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SHADES OF ETON

By Percy Lubbock

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SHADES OF
ETON

By

PERCY LUBBOCK

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NOTE

A BOOK should speak for itself, and I hope this book may be capable of doing so; but I feel bound to help it on one point with a word in advance. In writing the pages that follow I may at times have lost myself so deeply in the past that it has appeared as the present – an illusion that might be misleading to a reader. Let me therefore say plainly that in this book Eton means Eton of my school-time, in the nineties of the last century, and never Eton of any later day. Many and close as my ties with Eton have always been and still are, I have no title to speak of the school from my own knowledge, save in respect of the years when I was a boy there; and it is to those years alone that I refer. Nor have I spoken of the living, but only of friends who have vanished since the days that I recall.

The greater part of chapters IV and V made an earlier appearance in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the editor of which has kindly allowed me to reprint the pages in question.

P. L.

SHADES OF ETON

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I

THIRTY years ago, when the century was running out, Eton had been ruled for a long while by the broad hand of Warre, and of the old pre-Warre Eton there was little that survived. Hornby indeed survived, who had been Headmaster before Warre, and who now was Provost – a figure of gentlemanly dignity in his chapel-stall, an old man in a great top-hat who was seen driving out of an afternoon, even walking (always in his great hat) through the playing-fields; and as he passed we saluted him according to rule. But not a boy, not the mightiest or the most favoured in the school, knew anything of Hornby save his aspect as he passed; none of us had ever spoken to him, ever crossed the threshold of his house. I hardly even knew where he lived; the Provost's Lodge rambles and straggles in and out among the college buildings, and for six years I was a boy in the school without learning where it began or ended; the notion of ever entering the Lodge, ever changing words with the Provost, never occurred to me or to any of us. Hornby, as Provost of Eton, had no greater part in our lives than Queen Victoria herself – had much the same part indeed, that of an image of dignity to which we took off our hats.

Gravely and distantly he returned the salute, and passed on.

Hornby survived, and I suppose that for our masters and tutors he preserved the memory, the air and the tone of an older Eton; certainly he was the only man in the place, thirty years ago, who could look down from any advantage of age or station upon our huge magnificent Warre. Did he look down, did he regard with some ironic coolness the booming magisterial energy of his successor? No doubt but he did; no man sees a successor in his place, watches him reforming, changing, casting out the old lumber with noise and enthusiasm, without allowing himself the reassurance of a cool kind smile; no doubt but Hornby, the courteous scholar and gentleman of a serener day, looked forth upon all that modern clatter of reform and blessed it with the faintest inflexion of sarcasm in his warmth. And was Hornby's open steady eye a discomfort to Warre in his labours? We at least, to whom Warre appeared with the majesty of Jove, could have no suspicion that any eye should disconcert him; for not only we, the largest and loudest of our masters were as schoolboys in his presence; all other noise went thin and dry, all other bulk fell away and shrank, when Warre in his panoply marched into the room. For us he was greatness manifest and unquestioned, so vast he was, so dominant.

I speak of his mighty days, as I knew and remember them. His old age came later, when his strength was shaken; that was after the time of which I write – I see

him only in the full noon of his tremendous power. I don't mean that we were frightened of him – why should we be? He too was aloft and remote, far beyond and above our occupations; upon a life led within the law, upon a prudent life, he had no practical effect. But pictorially, spectacularly, he impressed us to the utmost. When he came striding into a division for a visit of inspection, sweeping and rustling in his robes, it was a drama that never lost its grandeur; and there he stood, surveying us from his height with benignity, trolling out his sonorous comment on the lesson in hand; and it was not as though he were concerned to correct or instruct us, he was a great man who paid us the compliment of striding in to observe our labours. I never thought of him as a schoolmaster; he was the president of our state, representing us before the world, with officials under him in plenty for the conduct of our business; and if he chose to take a part in it, to do some teaching in school, to call our names from the chapel-steps at absence, so might the head of a government descend to intervene paternally in some function of his ministers. That was how it seemed; he came down to us as it pleased him, he withdrew to an upper sphere.

When he came down in wrath – it very seldom happened, but when he did come down in wrath the earth shook, and his great voice was a trumpet, shattering the air. I have seen no one so grand in anger as Warre could be. I still behold him as he leans over the big raised desk at the end of Upper School, while we

crowd in, hundreds of us, by the doors at the other end; we surge in, thronging the long room, packing closer and closer; and he leans motionless, and gazes very solemnly before him, and at last, when we are all settled, the doors are shut and silence falls – a dead silence, hollow with expectation, awaiting his voice. And then it breaks out: grave words, deeply charged with emotion, ringing down the length of the room – rising, reverberating, crashing in indignation – dropping again, darkening in sorrow, swelling and thundering in the earnestness of his warning, his appeal, his exhortation. This is a grave matter. He speaks out, he talks from the depth of his heart: 'I speak to you, not as your headmaster only, but also – I dare to say it – as your friend.' There is no mistaking the truth, the intensity of his feeling; a passionate sincerity is in the words that are torn from him. It is a serious day for all of us. He finishes with his head bowed in his hands, the thunder of his voice sinking low and lower; till again the silence falls, crowded now with the echo of his fervour, thick with the throb of stirred thought, strange tempests of thought in the hundreds of his listeners. We disperse in an unusual hush, carrying a memory of that scene with us which will last for ever.

That was Warre at his mightiest, as we mercifully had seldom occasion to see him. When he preached to us in chapel he stirred nobody, he was merely a headmaster doing his duty; he preached as the old head of an old school may be expected to preach, with all his

dignity and his sonority, with round phrases that rolled away to the roof unnoticed till he came to an end. Strong as he was to feel, I suppose he was not powerful to think, and in a sermon he judged it proper to think as well as he could; and this was fatal, all the fire and energy of his emotion was lost in the effort. Then he was conventional, using the old dull moulds of thinking and phrasing that he dropped at once when he leaped forth without premeditation. As for his mind, his own real mind, we never knew it at all until we rose to the top of the school, if we rose, and reached the division which he partially and fitfully taught in person. Some knowledge of his odd jumbled storehouse of a mind we did then acquire, as also of his musing wandering speculating humour; but neither his humour nor his mind had the accent, whatever it is, that catches the attention of a clever boy. I was never even faintly interested to discover the curious various mass of information that Warre would bring out, turn over, ponder upon for an hour in which he was supposed to be teaching us. He taught me nothing at all; the richness of his big slow genial rumination was spread before us in vain.

There can be no question but he was a splendid figure, *the* splendid figure, among the schoolmasters of his day. He towered over Eton in those years, our great man, impressing us so memorably that even now, thirty years later, it hardly seems to me strange, barely relevant, to notice that his intellectual effect upon us was none whatever. He changed, he reformed, he

refashioned; the mark of his capable hands was everywhere; but of any heritage of quickened thought he left no trace. The work that he did was the work that was chiefly needed at the moment, let us say; and yet it is remarkable, and it gives the measure of Warre's prepotency, to find how easily one forgets that by this great schoolmaster nobody was educated. He brought forth his lore, he quoted the poets, he harangued us upon the grammar of the ancients; but he absolutely lacked the gift of the kindling spark, nothing that he touched ever sprang to fire in his teaching. And how was that, with all that he possessed? – for in his capacious and desultory genius a young idea might well have found its inspiration, one would think; he had the large looseness of fancy which ought to have attracted the curiosity of a young disciple. Not one of us dreamed of listening seriously to Warre in a school-hour; we waited politely for it to pass.

We had seen the truth in our younger days, before we reached his division. Warre, splendid among schoolmasters, was not a schoolmaster at all. He was a leader, a statesman, a prime minister, and he loved the ancient state that he governed, and all his heart and strength was thrown into the task of ordering the state securely and guiding it prosperously. It was for others to educate his subjects. And that, no doubt, is a reasonable view of the function of the head of a state. Warre in his day was broad and safe and massive. An air of the world was about him, travelled with him – or if not of the

world, an air of England, a large-limbed high-coloured Victorian England, seated in honour and plenty. Warre was as English as ever a man could be. He was a scholar, but his scholarship was that of a fine old English gentleman, no pedagogue; he was a churchman, and his religion was that of a stout old English bishop in his palace, an enemy to new enthusiasm. In his country holidays he liked to be a man of the soil, Farmer Warre, a breeder of prize pigs – he might have been a pamphleteer on guano and on grain, like the huge-fisted baronet of Tennyson's 'Princess,' whom he very much resembled. He was a democrat – he can never have doubted that he was. 'Warre is a great democrat,' it was said of him by a wise and witty colleague, 'he holds that everyone should have a vote and that everyone should vote for Warre.' He loved Eton, he loved and believed in England – believed in England indeed so profoundly that his highest hope for Eton was that the school should please and satisfy the country. What was his idea of education? His idea was that it should produce solid and honourable Englishmen after the country's heart.

His love of learning and his love of virtue, they both looked full and square to an end in sight; what he desired, that he saw plainly in broadest daylight. He marched ahead along a straight road across an open plain. The celestial city was there in the distance, yet not so very distant; marching behind Warre, keeping close to his voluminous skirt, one could never have a

moment's doubt of reaching it. A noble pile of a city too, so it was: an ample habitation for big and strenuous men – for good wise women, mothers of large and lusty families – for lives of honest sudorific fruitful labour. Some beauty it had undoubtedly, the beauty of broad spaces and sturdy masses and well-seasoned tones; and if some could desire more beauty than it had, no one could disparage its convenience, the cleanly modernity of its practical appointment. Good Englishmen, sound-winded baronets, might truly be content to think that Warre would march them before sundown into such a harbour. Warre shouldered the responsibility. Only let everyone vote for Warre, follow him faithfully, hold together behind him in a compact body – success was certain, success with honour, success in which there would be nothing cheap, nothing vulgar or ignoble. Who could ever doubt it? No one could. Very well then, there is no more to be said; clearly it would be perversity not to vote for Warre.

And yet, so perverse is man that the heaven of Warre's ideal was less inspiring than he could prove that it should be. What was wrong? I don't think he was pleased if he was called on to listen to fanciful objections; he was impatient of dissatisfaction in the face of proof so plain. Heaven that was good enough for our fathers that begot us – and more than that, a heaven purged of many an old abuse, old corruptions that our fathers had overlooked, so that as we can easily see for ourselves we shall be much better off than they: here is heaven enough

in all conscience for us their offspring. Captious argument on the subject would displease our Warre, would even fluster him, throw him out of his stride; for the necessary thinking and arguing had all been done by our fathers and by him, there was no need for more and he had had enough of it – fall in, fall in, and get on with the march! And on the whole I suppose his regiment did fall in, so potent was the authority of his voice; but their thoughts he couldn't completely drill, and he never succeeded in persuading us that our hearts leaped up when we beheld the new and thoroughly reformed Jerusalem to which he pointed. It had, you see, one grand defect – and I can picture Warre's gesture of impatience when it is named. Here is indeed a futile and presumptuous quarrel with a fine ideal; for our quarrel amounts essentially to this only, that his celestial city is too near, too visible and too attainable – the road to it is too straight, too plain. What a complaint for a leader of men, plodding sturdily through the dust, to be asked to consider in earnest!

Well, it *was* the real trouble, none the less. Jerusalem, as Warre conceived it, had no allurement of remoteness; it was all good gold, there was admirable work in it, but it lacked romance. He might smile or frown, most reasonably, at the suggestion that it was easily to be reached; that was an immodest and evident mistake. But it *looked* too near; and it looked, for heaven, decidedly too like the world. If we were all of us what Warre in his highest flight of aspiration would make us,

we should be magnificent, but not heavenly at all – not for a moment. We should all be the best baronets ever seen, loyal and true and kind, the salt of the earth; we should all be honest secretaries of state, open-handed village squires, broad-minded bishops; it would be a good day for the land of our fathers. But worldly as a young person may be, as young people are, there is a want of magic in success; it doesn't trouble us, doesn't disquiet us with its enticement. We love it, but not with a love that transfigures the world we know, deliciously disturbing it. Warre had no notion of our asking to be disturbed, to be tempted by some vision less obviously fair and fine; his suspicion of our motive would have been grave, if the notion had been suggested. Show yourself, come out into the light – that was his word to any shy secret thought which slipped away in search of the unknown, the unseen: come out, don't skulk in the shadow – for who knows what a thought may not think if Warre's vigilant eye is not upon it? Surely he mistrusted the twilight in which poetry gleams and beckons. The broad noonday for him: and if poetry has nothing to be ashamed of, why should it hesitate to follow and join him in the wholesome blaze?

Poetry, as a matter of fact, fled from him with a will; poetry was never seen in his company – not by us at least, his young followers. I am not saying that we missed it. Worldly young people are not on the watch for romance, they don't think the day wasted if it doesn't appear; a day of prose is a day like another –

what else does youth expect? But it is not to be imagined that our brains will be fired in such a day, and if you think it desirable to disquiet our placidity with a thought, an idea, somehow or other you must strike a flash through the prose of the day. Nothing that has so many sanctions behind it as the method of Warre, nothing so stamped with the approval of good men, will start that pleasant perturbation of our minds; there is no chance for it here. Good manners and good feelings and honourable ambitions are encouraged in his presence, it is certain; but you never in his presence escape from the world, you make no discovery of enchantment. Is it proper and right that we should be left to make that discovery for ourselves, in our own way? – a young person is not to be instructed in romance, he is to find it if he can. Why yes indeed, it will always be after his own fashion, in his own way, that he will find it; nobody can devise a course of indoctrination for his training in romance. All the more reason, then, why there should be poetry in the air, so that the opportunity to see it is always open to the desirous mind.

And after all, in spite of everything, Warre's signal accomplishment in the school *was* a poetical one, and we all received the effect of it unawares. He dignified Eton, he adorned it – not merely with fine commodious buildings, not with practical improvements. He was our visible head, he embodied the school; and there before us, in him, appeared the greatness of the great old state. With him in view it was evident that Eton

must be great. Of a young person's loyalty to the school, of his affection for it and pride in it, there is always a difficulty in speaking at all; for they have a way of vanishing when words try to seize them. They melt under the grasp of words, they are gone; and presently they reappear elsewhere, in the most unlikely quarters, and words are again too slow and heavy to catch them. Let it not be pretended, then, that to call a young Etonian loyal, loving, proud, is to speak the truth with nicety; I think myself back into a young Etonian of the last century, and these confident epithets seem to have very little hold upon the facts. The words may remain, however; for in their blundering style they are pursuing a truth, and no better can be found to overtake it. And whatever I felt for Eton, whatever potency there was in the idea of Eton, it was manifest in the figure of Warre, towering above us. He *was* Eton, before our eyes; and so the idea of Eton struck home in a young imagination – splendidly, illustriously, with the ample and generous dignity of Warre himself. We didn't take him over-seriously on the whole, it was never on him that we tried to model our opinions and our manners; the chosen idols of our enthusiasm, whoever they might be, were not like Warre. But the best loyalty, that which endures, that which will stand all tests, is the loyalty which is salted with laughter; and Warre, booming out our names from the chapel-steps, is entirely a great and fine, not entirely a solemn sight – and he is Eton.

II

AND then there was his unofficial and informal side, his jollity; this too we naturally saw not often, but others knew it well. The charm of Warre in his hour of ease, it was surely very great; I wish I had more pictures of it in memory. Yet I recall one occasion, not to be forgotten, when it was shown to us all – an occasion of another assembly of us all in Upper School, very different from that of which I told just now. It was equally an event, an exceptional summoning of us into his presence for an allocution. We didn't know what to expect; an unimagined bomb, perhaps, was about to explode. But there is no alarm in that, if you are not feeling unusually guilty yourself; there is a stimulating thrill. School-life is monotonous at best, the official part of it. In our private affairs there is plenty of incident, it is true – too much of it indeed; one of the worst of my trials is the jumpiness that comes of never knowing exactly what will happen next in my relations with my neighbours. Till time has made my own position reasonably secure they are unaccountable; dreadful revolutions, party convulsions, ups and downs of favour, take place more quickly than you would think possible; it may be an interesting, but it is an agitating

life, throughout the years of one's probation. It is not so in school-hours, on the whole, for the law-abiding; there things run by rule and prescription, day in, day out, and any surprising jolt of the machine is welcome. The news that the Head requires our attendance for an unexplained reason is exciting.

The reason, when we heard it, wasn't terrible, and Warre made no great ado about it. But he wanted to talk to us on a few small points, small in themselves; and we might smile, as he did himself, when he explained what they were. He didn't interfere with our code of manners and fashions in general; everybody knows that it is strict, and its strictness is largely of our own making; and if we choose to be the slaves of a convention nobody else will object, so long as it doesn't impair the seemliness of Eton. The Head doesn't intrude or dictate in these matters if he can help it; for it is understood that a person at Eton dresses and demeans himself in public after a time-approved style. It is so; yet innovations do creep in – trifles, no doubt, but they accumulate gradually; and perhaps somebody looks round one day and discovers that our style isn't now as estimable as it was. This is a genial talk. We were all in a good humour together, as Warre descended to particulars; and I could at this moment, on this page, set them down – it is not memory that fails me, only the face to do so. But the large diffusion throughout the crowd of us, packed together anyhow upon the desks and benches, of Warre's companionable kindness, the

indulgence of his smile and his remonstrance – this is most worthy to be recalled; he radiated a mood in which we all felt proud to please him. It was altogether mellow and liberal, the manner of his dealing with us; there was a flash of natural roguery and enjoyment in his eye, as he criticised our ways and expressed his desires. He dismissed us at last in a glow, and we proceeded to follow his directions, whatever they were, with high enthusiasm. Our leaders of fashion set the example and sternly watched to see that it was imitated; but there was no need for their vigilance – the word of Warre was enough.

I place him in my mind beside that other and so different figure, Hornby, the Provost; and there comes at once a curious shade of change in the manner of Warre. I never knew Hornby at all, as I have said, except as an image that was part of our familiar scene; but the picture is clear to me, and most expressive – Hornby's air of courteous detachment, his gentlemanly repose, his precision, all in such contrast with Warre's fresh and rosy looks, the rich sanguine life that was in him, the pervasion of his warmth. Hornby's hint of critical irony, watching events from his seclusion, is so alien to the energy of Warre that they appear immediately as figures representing diverse traditions, figures that illustrate two of the ideas, two of the many, which have lurked at the heart of Eton during her history. Is it presumptuous to claim that Eton has had ideas? I needn't press the word, for I mean to look into

the things, whatever they are, more closely; ideas or moods or passing fancies, something has changed in the heart of Eton from time to time, spreading outward to changes that the eye can seize. And they are seized most easily in her representative men – in two of them, for example, now before you. Warre, in this picture, looks very much of a man, urgent and exuberant; but also he is boyish – unmistakably he is boyish in the vividness of his good faith. It is simple of him to believe so fervently in virtue and honour, so candidly in the discipline by which they are to be won. It is impossible to suppose that an older head and a cooler brain will not throw a little irony into the regard that rests on Warre.

When this happens it is an historic moment, rightly considered. For undoubtedly it betokens a change in the mood of Eton – a change from something cooler, perhaps wiser, to something warmer, perhaps more generous; and a change at Eton is likely to have meanings larger than Eton itself. It is probably a reflection, in a small mirror, of a movement at a distance, out in the world; for Eton's attachment to the world is very close after all. That air of peaceful antiquity that descends upon you as you enter school-yard from the street may be deceptive. The old brickwork of Lupton's Tower that takes the evening sun in such a gracious placidity; the vast grey buttresses of chapel that heave aloft in the shade; the little bronze statue of the Founder on his pedestal in the midst, flourishing his sceptre at the pigeons: such a scene it is of historic calm, noble in

beauty, seasoned in homeliness, that it may appear to be screened from modernity by more than the green row of lime-trees which protect the entrance from the street. And even more, perhaps, at the hour of absence, when the young people troop to school-yard to answer the call of their names, and the place is all rumour and movement, a stir of business that begins upon the last stroke of the clock and is carried through with swinging promptitude – then even more, perhaps, the impression is one of a quaint small polity, immersed in its own affair, distinct and compact amidst the incoherence of things outside; so that Eton looks like a world to itself, with such a neat line drawn around it as we don't observe in the confusion of life at large. But this is most deceptive; for Eton of all places is attached to the world without. It is a child of the world – and even a spoilt child too, perhaps you say.

It is anyhow the child of no neglectful parent; and you may imagine its parent always very near at hand, close in its scrutiny – wise or unwise, I don't say; and if the world, whose child it is, should be struck by an idea, oppressed or enlivened by a mood, then in one way or another its Eton will suffer or will benefit, no doubt – will at any rate show a change of thought or fancy. Eton is more sensitive than we might suppose. These variations of its look are therefore well worth watching; and here is one so picturesquely marked that it can't escape us. Warre, we note, is straining with a passion that his companion will indeed respect, for it is

grand; but Warre's assurance, his certainty of himself, has by no means the bland composure of his companion's. I shall presently take the chance of yet another glimpse of Warre, caught at a moment that may throw some light upon his diffidence, and its nature; but meanwhile it is striking to see how the overflow of his zeal makes Hornby the grown-up person of the two – makes of him the matured experienced gentleman, versed in affairs, scrupulous and witty, who doesn't waste emotion upon life that has ceased to surprise him. I wonder with what persuasive art he can have addressed the school, seriously or playfully, when he was its head. I can imagine no one failing to respond in courtesy to Hornby, in courtesy equal to his own; and in any unruly impulse I should feel myself rebuked by his judicious taste. But if there were a fire to be kindled, a storm to be raised, would you look to Hornby for the flame and the commotion? No indeed – though you might expect to find that a deal of good work, not spectacular, had been achieved in the place under his sane and lucid direction. Eton in his day was required to be a thoroughly civilised child, and as soon as possible a man of discriminating culture.

Warre also required us to be men, as we have seen, the salt of the earth – but with a vast difference. Citizens of no mean city, as I can hear him put it – prepared to quit us like men, according to the measure of our abilities and the diversity of our gifts: such we were to prove ourselves in the days to come, when we issued

forth to do and dare. The adventure of life awaited us; and here at Eton we might rehearse the adventure, nourishing our strength, testing the nerve of enterprise and courage; for the school is only life writ small, as surely as life in the open but repeats the ordeal of the school. Culture and good taste by all means – they are the adornment of the fashioned man; but let it ever be remembered that the fine edge of discrimination, however sensitive, will avail us not at all without the rock on which our feet are to be set, the foundation of character. Warre's metaphors readily ran out of hand, but his point was not obscure. In the great world as in the small it is character that builds the city; and mark you well that if it is only given to this or that man to be graced with the rarer talents, to be confirmed in manly principle is given to you and to you and to you. There's no question now of misprizing the honest many who can't in singularity be conspicuous. The great work calls for everybody's strength, what it may be; and there's excuse for nobody to say that he hasn't his pound or ounce to contribute. Indeed we are to be men; but how is it that Warre's notion of manhood, so royally illustrated in himself, appears to be at the same time so boyish? A great schoolboy himself, through everything, his exhortation seems designed to make an everlasting schoolboy of each one of us, for all the responsibilities and the dignities that may crown our years.

This moral fervour of Warre's, it is perhaps too urgent, too instant to be free from jealousy – a noble

jealousy, but it works in him, I think, beyond his apprehension. (I don't mean in him only, in those of his tradition.) The young people entrusted to him are a charge that lies upon his heart; and if it were only a matter of the mere polishing and refining of our wits he could easily bear to watch us go our ways and make our choices; but the training of our characters is a deeper care, and he feels it with an intensity that is never relaxed, that will never let him rest at ease upon the thought that his duty is fulfilled. It is never fulfilled; for whereas you may work your brain for an hour, rest if for an hour and then find it as good a brain as ever, your moral worth can't be neglected – no, not for a minute with safety; mischief is ready to creep through any chink of time left open. And so the man who is consumed with zeal to train you into a goodly citizen, he can never with a quiet mind withdraw his influence; he is bound to watch you jealously; it is impossible that he should really wish you to grow up and turn your criticism upon the standard that he provides. He knows how much safer it is that you shouldn't think; you needn't be clever to know the difference between black and white, and if you aren't clever you won't be tempted to explain it away. Yes, it is clear that the fashioned man, out in the world, finds his best protection, his highest use, in being and remaining the honest boy he was taught to be at school – at school, where nobody but a simpleton supposes that any trial or temptation of the world is excluded. Let the city, therefore, be

built by men who at heart are honest boys. To their old friend and schoolmaster, loving them, understanding them, they will be his boys for ever.

It is the jealousy of a great spirit; and nobody must think that it implied, in our Warre, the ungenerous misdoubts of a smaller man. Warre was himself, through and through, natural and complete; no touch of complacency came near him; the man who extended his influence self-righteously was never Warre. Anxious, fearful as he might be – can a master of the young be unanxious? – he was by far too large-hearted in his ways to be pettily suspicious, meanly tyrannous; he couldn't have breathed for a moment in the atmosphere of a close-shut seminary. A glance at him in his stalwart ruddiness shows the absurdity of that idea; and the slightest acquaintance with his big simplicity proves to you that he is incapable of a pose. The judgments of the young, I own, go wildly astray on points of character in general; the little victims are easily deceived in their masters – but on one point never. We know at once, and are ruthless in using our knowledge, if our masters affect a counterfeit style for our benefit; and their veins of unreality, as you remember well, have been of several different shades. The vein of moral condescension is one – rare in our day, however; the vein of an assumed equality – when the unhappy man believes that we believe him to be one of us, in our own likeness – is another, not so rare. None of that rubbish could be dreamed of in connection

with Warre – and here it is of him I speak, not of all those of his tradition. He never preached down to us, he never made up to us; his word, grave or gay, came direct from the whole of himself, round and sound with the singleness of his nature. Of his truth, as of his generosity, there could never be a question.

But he was a diffident man, so it is said, though in that aspect he naturally didn't appear to us, his young flock. Our elders, who knew him more closely, tell another tale; they say that behind his magnificence there was a spirit of humility, of which a finely moving glimpse could be caught now and then. Moving indeed it must have been; and here is a sight of him that is described to me, and through other eyes I see it so clearly that my own, even in the old days, must have taken in more of the truth of Warre than I knew. It is a sight of him in chapel. There was a noble hymn of Charles Wesley's that he loved – we sang it often on Sunday evenings; and you must see, as the florid tune rolls out, the crowd of faces, the dark woodwork,[1] the flaring gas-flames of the brass coronas, the slender-soaring lines of the stone mullions that rib the long perspective of our chapel; and so the winding trailing tune rolls out, and we raise our noise to the roof – upon noble words, but words that sound oddly, perhaps, in our confident and many-hundred-throated chorus. The

[1] Which then masked the ancient paintings, since restored to view.

strange and baffling mystery of the hymn, the darkness of night in which a spirit wrestles till the dawn, struggling, straining to compel the unknown to declare his name – the mystery, the secret that is fought for in the night, we cheerfully proclaimed it to the roof, high above the flaring lights. The secret might seem to be lightly won by that young army.

'Come, O thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see,
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee;
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.'

Warre, in his surplice and his great black scarf, stood in his stall, and his strong and serious face, handsomely hewn, was turned towards his army of youth. He called himself our friend, and he looked it; but he arrogated nothing, no air of patronage, none of protective benevolence; and this is the moment when I see and recognise, as though I chanced to catch sight of him across the crowded chapel, his humility – his diffidence in the midst of his power. He is all alone in the crowd, intent as we are upon our hymn, and it is thus that one learns how his nature was straight and single throughout; for in his solitude his dominance breaks and melts into his humility, and yet he is the same – it is the power of Warre that is revealed, as if one had never really

known it before. It is greatness brought round upon itself, shown to itself and shown as no greatness, no support, a reed that was a pillar – and all without the consternation of the small man who had thought himself great; for this is a man, great in other eyes, who has had no thought of himself at all. He looked as though he could discover that there was no help in him without being afraid of helplessness. And presently the hymn is at its climax; the organ gathers itself for a crash, resounding upon the word that resolves the mystery. The wrestler has triumphed, the strange antagonist is revealed; the shout goes forth upon his name.

> 'Tis Love! 'tis Love! Thou diedst for me!
> I hear thy whisper in my heart.
> The morning breaks, the shadows flee;
> Pure universal Love thou art.
> To me, to all, thy mercies move;
> Thy nature and thy name is Love.'

Warre swept down from his stall at the end of the service and marched out behind the hoary-headed group of the Provost, the Vice-Provost, the aged Bursar. He bore down on them, he seemed to master them, so strong and handsome as he strode forth under the archway beneath the gilded organ-pipes. And yet we know him self-mistrustful in the depth of his heart. 'When I am weak, then am I strong': there was that in Warre which could echo the words of Paul. The apostle,

glorying in infirmity, did not suffer in the confidence of his purpose and his voice; his infirmity vibrated in his resolution like a pulse of vigour. And in Warre too, for all his martial robustness, you can detect that tremor, that reverberation, which is the sign that a man's strength is vivid and sensitive, not dull. I might have missed this sight of him, were it not described to me by one who admired him with more knowledge than I; but I can think that I do now understand why our hearts go out to him so warmly, recalling him as he passes out of view. We shall get no inspiration, I say again, from anything that he was capable of expounding. But to think that Warre, alone by himself, had no trust in himself; and to think that he loved his flock and loved Eton passionately and humbly; and to think how he towered above us all, through the long day of his power, our head and our champion: such are the thoughts that kindle our memories of him for ever.

III

AN Eton master of older days, the poet of 'Ionica,' once made a note in his diary of a remark, quoted from I know not whom, that he proposed to use for the text of an essay. It was this: 'Every school should make the most of that which is its characteristic: Eton should continue to cultivate taste.' He, the poet, evidently found a point of truth and a leading in this pronouncement; the taste of Eton was notable, it was worthy to be studied and fostered. Taste began – I suppose it began at Eton in a just appreciation of ancient letters; it started from intercourse with the strains of classic beauty, the treasure of old art in which beauty lies perfect and still – so still that we may stay to watch it, linger over it without fear that its lines will dissolve before our eyes, trembling away to intangibility. The art of the ancients is the art that pursues an attainable perfection; it is not distracted by the thought of beauty out of reach and sight, round the next turning, below the sky-line; the form and the expression, they coincide in this clear light to a hair's-breadth, and no loveliness of intention is lost, for none is sought that an exquisite artistry may not save. Is that a true account of the work of Greeks and Romans? It is anyhow true enough to begin

with and to start from, when we attempt the purification of our taste; and until our taste is fairly to be trusted we had best avoid the questions, the baffling doubts of another kind of beauty, that which won't stay quiet and composed beneath our gaze. Classic art, wrapt in immobility, bathed in light, offers itself serenely, a changeless and peerless ensample to our mutable years.

That, let us suppose, is the theory of our education in taste, the reason why it clings (or used to cling) to those ancient forms; with all that certainty and clarity of loveliness before us we shall learn to distinguish the good from the not so good, the fair from the less fair, if we are capable of learning at all to do so. And there was a time, we understand, when this pursuit was held to be the characteristic ornament of Eton; it was in 1867 that William Cory made that entry in his diary. The pursuit, needless to say, looked far beyond the mere grace of scholarship. Away in the life of the world, when schooling was over, classical taste was expected to win the victories of Eton in many fields; or not in very many, perhaps, for Eton wasn't promiscuous, but at least in the liberal professions, in the spheres of the duty of a gentleman. In all of these the Etonian was marked, I trust, by his fine appreciation of the good, the fair and the true; if ever he wasn't the fault is not to be imputed to the theory of his training. The intention of Eton was clear in this matter; Eton received the ingenuous boy and turned him out a young gentleman indeed. But remark, however, this – that in those days

of our fathers it was a question of a polish and a finish to be applied to the stuff of which nature had formed the boy; and of course it is true that nature forms many a boy of rough-grained stuff that won't accept a high degree of finish. Well, these last must fare as best they may; exposure to the taste of Eton will have done them no harm, at any rate. And on the whole it was assumed, no doubt, that a boy who came to Eton had the makings of a pretty young gentleman within him; and Eton only promised to make him as tasteful as he could be made.

Does it seem a little thin, this notion entertained of old at Eton, compared with the fervour of our later age? Isn't it a greater thought, to make good honourable citizens of all of us than to polish up a few men of taste? I don't think it will seem that the old notion, fully explored, was a poor one; at present I simplify my account of it, to force the contrast, but there will be much more to say of it in time. Enough just now to observe the word of William Cory, and how it seemed to him, the best of judges, appropriate to Eton in his day; and then let me wonder if in my day, many years later, a judge as shrewd as Cory could have said that Eton had quite forgotten its traditional task in its enthusiasm over a newer mission. I needn't wonder long; for with all the changes of our time there were tokens of the past that were still left to us, bequeathed from the reign of the classical idea. That reign was long since over, no doubt; to the modern genius of Eton, embodied in Warre, our virtue was the first concern and the second and the third;

when once we were virtuous – and the word must be taken liberally and generously, not coldly – then and then only was our instruction in the humanities of chief importance. But though our masters now felt ten times as responsible for our conduct as for our taste, Eton under Warre was not likely to lose its air of a classically minded school. Many innovations had pushed the classics closer and closer to the wall; but their back was against it still, and now and then, on particular occasions, you might see us step forward to meet the general eye, not as young barbarians at play, but as young gentlemen indeed, of seemliest port. Will you glance at us in such an hour?

Behold us then on a wintry morning, again collected in Upper School; but this time the concourse is not large. A few rows of benches at one end are enough for the small audience of boys and masters; in front are the chairs of state for the Provost, the Vice-Provost, the Headmaster. This is 'Speeches'; three or four times in each half they happen thus, leading up to our grand display upon the Fourth of June. Speeches are delivered to this audience in this searching light by members of Sixth Form, who take in turn the centre of the floor, cleared for the purpose. They declaim, they recite passages of prose or verse, in ancient or modern tongues; but if in modern they must be by authors approved by the Headmaster as ranking in the family of Virgil, of Demosthenes. The names in English literature that can claim this affinity are known to Warre;

no others are admitted. But that which I rather dwell on than the recital itself is the appearance of the reciters. They are adorned as though to face, not this small group of boys and masters, but the attention of a court. In full dress, in breeches and black silk stockings, they stand forward upon the bare boards and raise their voices; and I remember how our voices fall rather appallingly on the pale air, wanting the comfort of crowds and lights and applauding courtiers. It is a little grim, if one thinks of it; only of course one doesn't think much, for it is a recurrent and familiar trial, with its place in the day's work. But at any rate here is Sixth Form upholding for a few chill minutes, three or four times in the half, the tradition of forensic tone; and the young gentlemen in their silk stockings are linked in the act with the illustrious names, not a few, carved upon the wainscoted walls to their left and right. It is a heritage; it is a thread of affiliation, if you will lend yourself to the fancy, from the past of Eton, from the classic day, from the time when Eton was a nursery of men of taste, and men of taste were statesmen.

This in short is where the young scholar exercises an art that will be proved one day upon a wider stage; and while he declaims he sees an opening future in which his eloquence may sway the commonwealth. In my day it is but a fancy, to be sure, for we aren't now regarded as the rising hopes of a 'governing class'; the world into which we shall presently be tumbled is not the world upon which young Pitt, young Gladstone

advanced with an impressive gesture and a flashing eye. It has been discovered long ago that a ruder competition awaits us beyond the limes of Eton; and though it may seem to Warre that the higher commands are still our due in church and state, to him too it is very evident, as we have seen, that we are not now to rely upon our privilege, such as it may be, but upon our soundness of heart, our straightness of purpose. In the ceremony of Speeches, however, we revert for a few minutes to our antique elegance, and we are adorned as befits our degree. We do our best; but I can't pretend that we are very like young Gladstone. The classic day had a distinction to which we don't attain; the young Etonian of the spacious days, he strikes you as a man of the world compared with us. Dressed up in his breeches and stockings we may resemble him for a moment, but you know that in contrast with him we are simple youth. We can't declaim our Demosthenes and Virgil, nor yet our Burke and Milton, with the least appearance of addressing the House of Commons. Too well we are aware that the scholar of Eton, nowadays, is the rising hope of nobody in particular; no eyes are bent upon him, admiring the youthful ambition that will spur him forth to adorn the wider stage. If you desire to watch the budding hero of these new days you won't look for him upon the floor of Upper School. You know well where to look – everybody knows; we have long been trained to understand that the hopes and the heroes of Eton are out of doors, out of school – very intent upon

their studies, it is true, but pursuing them in other fields.

Between the sixties and the nineties, then, this change had been wrought. In the sixties it was possible for a man who knew Eton through and through to adopt the notion that the plume of Eton was its taste; and in the nineties it is a memory that I revive for amusement, a mark of the distance that we have travelled in that span of time. It would be droll in the later day to say that our pride, what we think of first when we think of the fine figure of Eton before the world, is our mastery of the civilised arts. Of course I don't imply that the young people in the days of our fathers weren't barbarians too; they were indeed, and in many things more barbarous than we. And yet it could be held that the elect Etonian, he who came nearest to the heavenly Etonian type, was a young gentleman imbued with the classical spirit. Did you ever hear the like of that in our time? If you were a scholar your tutor was pleased; by a few of the masters you were distinguished with a sober approval. But your triumph, it must be owned, was very quiet and private, very domestic in tone; and none the worse for that, I dare say, but my point is that you could never suppose yourself in the centre, in the main stream of the hopes of Eton. Culture, when the century was running out, was for all I know more plentiful than it had been of old; but it couldn't regard itself as heavenly or as typical – it was a by-end in Eton's work, the making of men. And note that in all this I am

not referring to the fashions of hero-worship among ourselves in the school; let these be as they may be – I don't think they were always as conventional as our preachers and teachers often appeared to assume. But officially, by all the pressure of suggestion from authority, we were taught the newer doctrine. Keep your ambition high and bright, by all means, said the newer doctrine, but remember that you achieve it by being good and brave, doing and daring, a man among men. So it was said or implied; though their man and their men, as I remarked just now, seemed very like boys to the end.

But for the moment there is no thought of virtue, manly or boyish, as we step forward in turn to deliver our speeches, facing the Provost. We are back in the past, and the Provost sits in state to witness the fruits of our cultivation of a manner and a tone. Remember that though we see him daily, in chapel and about the place, he is utterly foreign to our ordinary concerns; perhaps he may now and then preach us a cool and shapely sermon in chapel, but otherwise we don't so much as know the sound of his voice. He emerges from the Lodge, where he lives a life, isolated amidst the bustle of the school, that is quite beyond my imagination; and this business of Speeches is the only event in our days, outside chapel, that draws him forth to take a part amongst us. It is a mute part, even this; he simply sits and listens courteously; but he assumes a position, that of the patron of our efforts, and at any rate he makes us feel that there is a power, not ourselves, to which our

performance may be addressed. We couldn't put on our solemn stockings and breeches for an audience of ourselves and our everyday masters – not even for Warre, who at least to Sixth Form is a figure of every day. And so the Provost, with the Vice-Provost and the Bursar to support him, provides us with a kind of court after all, subdued as it is; and the whole proceeding, with one of us in attendance to hand him the book of the words, is conducted with fitting circumstance. Why do I linger upon this chilly scene, that is all over in twenty minutes, and that indeed is of very small moment in the course of the half? Only because, searching my memory, I find it one of the rare occasions when the young people at the head of the school, Sixth Form, make a pale appearance of representing the school in a ceremony. You can't deny that at most times the life of Sixth Form is very obscure.

I don't mean that the blaze of publicity which fell so often upon the leaders of the school in other fields – I don't mean that I covet this for the inglorious scholar: what an idea! It is of a far discreeter honour that I am thinking, one which perhaps he only enjoyed in a golden age that never was, though he may have had some portion of it in the palmier days of the classical faith. It is like this: the young scholar – which is my name for the young son of the liberal arts, their educated offspring – may once have had a support that in later days he wanted, the support of a peculiar encouragement. If I were a young person of this kind I should like to feel that my good old Eton was really backing me with her

whole heart; I should like to think I was of the kind that Eton particularly wished me to be. It wouldn't be good for me at all if I perceived that Eton was uncertain and hesitating in this matter, that Eton was even half-inclined to wish me different, not just that. Either I should be dreadfully discouraged, I should shrink into a corner and try to escape unobserved; or else – you may consider it more likely – I should be defiantly pleased with myself, I should begin to think myself better than Eton. Not a fortunate issue for me, either way: my education in the liberal arts would soon go awry. If it is desirable that our young taste should grow straight and true it needs all the sympathy of our wise old Eton; and it hadn't that, it hadn't the backing of a whole-hearted favour. Oh no: we couldn't dream of thinking that it had; Eton's favour, the main weight and the full warmth of it, was kept for those who would do greatly, do honourably, in a newer tougher world. The world is no longer a place that will submit to be awed and swayed by a tasteful young gentleman. Eton had taken ample time, in her dignified way, to verify the discovery; but having done so she adopted it with a will. Conduct, which even Matthew Arnold had reckoned to be three-fourths of life, was now to be all but the whole of it. The heroes of Eton must be armed to meet the new age, not the old; for surely you hope that the world may yet be won, I won't say awed or swayed, by Eton.

Well, we may agree to that; and we may even assume for the moment that Eton has rightly judged the new

age, how it is to be faced and persuaded. Eton didn't arrive at the conviction in haste, at any rate; the century had long passed its turn before the change of heart was evident behind the limes. But in the nineties it was old history, and you see how little I can produce, stretching a fancy to help me out, by way of illustrating a survival in our midst of the elegant tradition. A few other trifles I might discern, belated signals in the course of our routine; but I won't display their faintness. It is much more rewarding to remember that under some of the roofs of Eton, privately, informally, there reigned a spirit that ignored the order of the day. I have many a reason to recall it. I can't say in honesty that it touched our schooling at all; it never appeared at any hour in which we were supposed to be learning a lesson – never, I can say, for I instantly think of the surprising moments when it did. But there were Eton roofs under which the free spirit, out of school, was supreme; and when I cross certain thresholds I am quickly aware that the value of life is differently esteemed – it is the strangest difference. A blessed ease descends upon the worried mind; for indeed it is worrying, even though it is all but a second nature, to be for ever denying, excusing, veiling the fact that you aren't the real right thing. What was it in a word, the right thing? It isn't quite simple to say; but the right thing was sure of itself and had no misgiving; and the wrong thing, however defiant, always knew itself too, had always its creeping anxiety. And now, entering certain doors,

you suddenly find these things, the right and the wrong, reversed – or rather the category abolished; new rights and wrongs appear, and you have a fresh start, and you have as good a chance to approve yourself as anybody else. How strange and new! – I shall never forget the relief. In some of these pages I shall enter those doors once more; I wish I could hang a garland on them that would endure. But first I must go back, a little further back in time, to a place that wasn't Eton, but a place where a double portion of the fine spirit was quietly saved. It had been borne thither from Eton of old; it recalled the days of the poet.

IV

THE place was a school, what we call a 'private' school, that flourished once in a big white house among lawns and trees, facing the North Sea from the coast of Kent. I think it was rather a fine old mansion; it had been the summer villa of an Archbishop of Canterbury in a time when archbishops were very grand; and with its shaven grass and bright flower-beds and masses of dark ilex-shade, with its broad white front and portly bow-windows, it still had an episcopal amplitude in its bearing, which kept the petty details of the schoolhouse in the background. The lawn fell away in undulations, the dark trees drew thickly around and below it, and over the lower tree-tops a band of sea shone in the morning sun. Down you go, through a door in the high flint wall behind the trees – cross the road – and then down a sloping field that is also a part of our domain; a belt of trees and shrubbery borders the field all round. Now you are at the lower end, unprepared for what you will find when you climb the fence and enter the wooded belt. Suddenly you see: this alley of leafage runs along the verge, the very edge of the great white precipice, the cliff of England – which drops so sheer below you that its face is hidden, and the eye

plunges off into space, into the bright singing air, into the endless rumble of the rollers on the beach beneath. It is a sensation; for in general the edge of England in those parts is open and naked, but here you discover the great drop into space unawares, masked as it is; and you sit on the edge, hidden from the land, alone with the North Sea. However all this is only my thought of it now, after many years; I was relentlessly occupied with life, not with solitude and the North Sea, nearly forty years ago.

Life was urgent, life was earnest, in our private school. I couldn't lightly say that I ever enjoyed it; sometimes it was very dreadful, sometimes it was big with interest, and a good deal of it was at least tolerable; but it never stopped, never let me go – it was a drama of experience in which there was never a pause. Three times a year indeed it was interrupted by the holidays; and then for a brief moment you could quit the stage, you could attend to your own affairs without being forced to reckon perpetually with the world; but the holidays were gone in a flash, and back you came to face the assault of publicity for another endless age. It would be far too exhausting to live at that pressure in later life; but ten-years-old can stand it, I suppose – at any rate he has to stand it, and to be told (if he questions why) that he will be grateful one day. Well, here is gratitude if you will, for the day has come; but my thanks, I must say, are won by aspects of the drama that I select for myself, not by the gross weight of it that was imposed

on me. There was too much of it all; and heaps of it weren't in the least my affair, weren't anything out of which I could draw matter for gratitude. When I think of the huge tract of time I spent at school, and when I think of the amount of it that wasn't fruitful, that worked no enchantment in a wakeful young imagination – that simply sat there until it was shuffled off – I see a waste of good time that I resent exceedingly; though I own that in one way it wasn't wasted, for it all went together to pack a capacious young memory, that is bursting with it now. Against all that I didn't learn I set the inordinate mass that I remember, the faces, the crowds, the jumble of voices, the long scenes enacted: I should be sorry to surrender these. I wish we had been educated, and I wish we hadn't been so beset that we could scarcely educate ourselves; but the distance is densely populated, and we return to it and push through the crowd again, hailing it with indulgence. Here is gratitude.

And moreover there was some education too, at our private school – a little, but it was of very good quality. I shall describe it. I needn't say that it wasn't the thing that was offered us in its name; if we seriously take the thing they called our education and look it in the face – well, we must smile. As for that, we sit under it and let it pass; for it does pass, interminable as it often seems, and if we wait long enough we occasionally get a surprise. The old man, the ruler of our school, with his attendant ushers, they contrive to teach us with marvellous patience day by day; and on the whole I

think we are patient too, sitting in order at our little desks. Many a day will pass, it is likely, before we get our surprise; the teaching goes on and goes on in the style that we know so well. And then it happens; and what happens is that the old man, in the midst of our teaching, forgets himself, forgets the lesson and us too – we are instantly aware of it. There is no mistaking the new tone of his voice, the absent stare of his eye or the suddenly thoughtful tilt of his head; his ordinary ways are so familiar that the least deflection from them twitches our attention. This is a glimpse of the real truth, a sight of the old man as he is when no one is looking; in the middle of a lesson he betrays himself, lapsing away from us into his private mind. I am not thinking, to be sure, of the common occasions when we start one of our pastors off on some ridiculous topic that he never can resist, some foolish fancy that he can always be made to chatter about with a little encouragement; that is a simple game – the strain is relaxed while he babbles contentedly. No, the real glimpse of him off his guard is quite a different matter; it is rare and unexpected and accidental, its virtue is in the fact that it is incalculable.

Here is the little scene. The old man on this occasion was standing in front of the big blackboard, facing his class for a lesson in the Odes of Horace; and we sat before him, row upon row, waiting for the proceedings to open in the time-honoured style. A lesson in Horace is called 'construing,' and somebody is 'put on to

construe' – which means that he stands up in his place and leads off by reading a stanza aloud in the Latin. Then he pauses and looks back, picks out a likely word – it is known as the 'nomative' – repeats it, gives an English word for it; and that accounts for the 'nomative,' with luck, and the first step is accomplished. He casts about again and finds a 'verb'; and so far perhaps it isn't difficult, but doubts begin to gather, the track is lost, the featureless words stare from the page without a sign; and the pauses lengthen, the old man waits expectant – till the construer desperately plunges, is pulled back, is shoved forward; and gradually word after word is dealt with and put behind him, a meaning has been provided for each of them, and the construing of the stanza is achieved. So much for that. Now we look up, waiting to know which of us is to tackle the next lines; and when he is named the rest of us feel reprieved, and we settle down again while he attends to the business of the second stanza; and I discover with a jump that he has presently finished it and that I myself am being called upon for the third. Well, one does what one can. There is peace for the construer when he resumes his seat, peace until the end of the hour; and at last, at last the whole lesson is disposed of, all the words in it have been given a meaning acceptable to the old man, and that is the end. We have construed an Ode of Horace.

Such is the time-honoured everyday style. But one morning the old man, standing before the blackboard,

his hands clutching his coat – (picture him with a mild and venerable and kindly face, spectacled, his big domed head scholastically bald above a fringe of close grey curls; clerically dressed in black, low-collared, white-tied; his eyes rather dim and vague behind his glasses, gazing peacefully: there he is!) – one morning he stood in front of us at the beginning of the lesson, and instead of putting somebody on to construe he paused, he stared over our heads; and then he broke out in a gentle mournful chant upon the opening words of our ode. He seemed to be saying them to himself – he knew them by heart. 'Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume' – he had a tuneful and flexible voice, and he threw into it a pensive lament as he dwelt on the repeated name. 'Postume, Postume!' – oh how time flies, how helplessly we see it vanish, how soon old age has overtaken us! He chanted the words very musically and appealingly – yet not quite seriously either, not sentimentally, but rather as though he liked to join with an old friend, old popular Horace, in a plaintive strain that *he* didn't intend very seriously; for these regrets and laments, they belong to the smooth philosophy of an honest poet, comfortable enough in his worldly wisdom – and a companionable old poet too, so life-seasoned, so familiar to a scholar who has known him by heart for fifty years. There is a touch of humour in their relation. Horace doesn't pretend to be perfectly solemn, and the scholar drops easily into his mood; though after all it *is* true, sadly true that time is fleeting and death is

tameless – quite true enough to set an old man agreeably musing and mooning as he chants the words. He had entirely forgotten us; he repeated the whole ode through to the end.

I suppose we then proceeded to construe it as usual, to provide meanings for the blind mouths of the blank words on the page. Of that I remember nothing; all I know is that the echo of the scholar's meditative sing-song is still as clear as yesterday in the brain of one of his listeners. I didn't understand a word of it, doubtless; but even on the spot I understood much more than the sense of a not very remarkable poem. I was distinctly impressed – not by Horace, but by the pleasing emotion of our fine old master; for he seemed to be carried into the unknown, leaving our desks and inkpots and daily construings far beneath him; he had slipped away to a brighter and richer region, one that he naturally preferred. It appeared to me that his own level was really up there; and I don't know that I thought it out, but I certainly felt in a manner that he possessed a secret, an interesting secret aloof from our common round. That notion of his falling into half-humorous companionship with the easy-minded poet is of course a later finding – perhaps even of to-day, as I listen once more to the musical echo I describe; yet whatever I find there now is only the fullness and the completion of that which began at the moment, on the spot, when the gaze of a young spectator followed him into the unknown. It might well surprise me that such a flight could be taken

from the ground of our daily inky task – from the nude expressionless page of the schoolbook, which speaks of nothing but the teasing search for the meanings of the words. The old man enjoyed the words themselves, the Latin words of Horace; and he didn't need to look at the book, for they lived in his memory, as though Horace's Odes – for which we troop to the schoolroom and sit at our desks and 'take notes' from the old man's dictation – were poetry.

He didn't often give himself away so felicitously as this; he held to the routine of our lesson, and he had long ago (for he really was rather old) fixed the lines and forms of his teaching, and he seldom broke out of them into unexpected excursions. We knew mainly what to look for in the quiet hours that we spent over our inkpots, under his eye. He had mild and serious manners; he used no frivolous modern arts to cajole us into consenting to be taught, to caress our difficult attention. He was kind, and we liked to please him; and on the whole it wasn't hard to please him, for his rule was easy and consistent. He was paternal without taking liberties; he treated us neither as children to be played with nor as fine young lads to be flattered and tamed. And indeed we were never either in his presence; we were people of politeness, decently observing the forms of society, respecting and respected. So at least I felt for my part, and it was refreshing to find how the problems of life were put aside in his company; I seemed to be nearly always responsible and dignified

when I was with the old man. There was an explosion occasionally, and he could be rather terrible in displeasure; but in general it was a smooth and reassuring tenor of a way, where one could forget the perplexities of one's station and degree. He had his twinkle of humour too, that beamed out sometimes behind his spectacles with the grace of rarity; and he talked in leisure as he might have talked if we had happened to meet in company, in casual friendly intercourse. We conversed like sensible beings, we discussed and reasoned and compared opinions; he struck me at the time as a level-headed and well-informed man of the world.

He struck me particularly by contrast with his assistants, the under-masters. There were several of these, and they varied from time to time, and I liked them all; some of them were very amusing and attaching in their ways. But I never doubted that compared with the old man they were raw, they were uninformed and inexperienced; their behaviour lacked the repose and their humour hadn't the mannerly dryness that mark the man of the world. Before I reached the courteous culture of the top class I had passed through the hands of more than one of these underlings; and I don't deny that things were livelier under their direction – for there were shocks and jerks in their teaching, sudden storms, jeers of sarcasm, roaring jests, that often brisked up the school-hours very pleasantly. But with all credit to the spirits and talents of these good souls we must admit

that they somehow lowered life, cheapening and popularising it, where the old man kept it always high and handsome. I must allow that the commoner part of myself, which is also the larger, exceedingly enjoys the less elevated style; I relish the unconventional sprawling and bawling of the creatures, the freedom they permit themselves, the smartness of their retorts. Sometimes they make me laugh so much that vital organs seem to crack within me; and when there are storms and squalls it is really exciting, glorious at times, so long as they don't actually burst on *my* head. All this I grant; but none the less I can't help seeing that the way of the old man is truly superior, and I know that when he passes and glances, not disapprovingly, at these more animated scenes, we all feel a trifle rude and babyish, including the cheerful sprawler himself.

And furthermore there are certain things for which I shall never to the end forgive the attendant ushers, one or two of them. They may deride and attack me during school-hours and in the way of discipline; it is unpleasant while it lasts, but it is to be expected, it may happen to anybody, and I bear no malice. Not for any professional malignity in school, but for their shameful treatment of me, now and then, in hours of freedom – for this I blast them. If it weren't beneath me to avenge myself I could name the wretch, here and now, who once made a public fool of me at a very ticklish crisis in my career – at a moment when I had all but succeeded in gaining a foothold in the best society. The more

fashionable circle at our private school was very properly exclusive, and I may have deceived myself at the moment I speak of, but I did think I saw a chance of winning its favour, its toleration at any rate; and I was proceeding so carefully, so artfully, when all in a minute my hope was shattered, my labour undone, by a scene so painful that even to satisfy my rancour I couldn't now describe it. If it had happened in school it would have mattered little; nobody thinks the worse of you for being pilloried, even very ignominiously, for an official indiscretion or offence. But one has the right, I must believe, to demand that out of school, in society, our masters should respect the social decencies, shouldn't wantonly add to the difficulties of the much-enduring social climber. On his own ground we fully allow the usher's claim – let him make the most of it; but if he wishes to join us in society he should humble himself, drop his privilege, consider our feelings without invidious discrimination. I am not asking the impossible; I don't in the least object to what we call 'favouring,' which is a human weakness; brilliance and charm will always have their victories, I think it only natural. But I do expect that the man who favours my comely rival shall at least do so at no expense to *me*, shall refrain from taking sides with him against my own inelegance. Enough, I grow warm, I will say no more; on the whole I really liked the man, and if he couldn't help trying to court the favour of fashion by slighting *me* – well, I have been there myself, I understand.

V

I MUST say, however, that miserable episodes of this sort were rare; it was seldom that our ushers fell so low. As for the old man, our chief – and him I presently shall name, with ceremony and respect – it was utterly unthinkable that he should presume, should trifle with our legitimate rights and claims. I justly valued the tone of his unofficial conversation. On certain afternoons he used to walk with us in the country; he led the way, a large and straggling company streamed behind him; and many and many a time I have been one of the pair who hung to his side for an admirable talk. We touched upon politics, literature, science – not heavily, not pedantically, but in the easy style of cultivated men. Our friend was widely read on all sorts of subjects, he had a scholarly taste; but I never thought him a mere book-worm – he was a man of affairs as well as learning. He knew the world, he sat on a weekly board that met in the neighbouring town; and at the same time he wasn't an ordinary party man, for I always felt that he treated practical questions with a certain philosophic calm. He was also a good country gentleman; he owned a small farmyard, close to the school, and we used to join him in watching the fattening

of his pigs, not without pride. Over all these matters of thought and action we ranged as we walked; we were liberal and broad in our views, without falling into crude extremes. I stored up dozens of pointed and humorous anecdotes, many of which still figure to this day in my talk.

And then there was his reading aloud – an hour every evening after school, before prayers and bedtime. At seven o'clock the last lesson was finished, and he marched away from the big schoolroom, clasping an armful of papers – off to his study upstairs, where all who would might follow him. I was never one of those who find it tedious or frumpish to read books to themselves; I was rather a gallant though a plodding reader; but I couldn't pretend that by myself I ever brought my books to life as our friend so splendidly brought them. He made a book really live, it is the word; the story rose up and opened out and closed about you, the people of the story seemed to be talking in the room – only that the room was forgotten, you sat and watched the drama in its own surroundings. We lived through book after book, many heroic romances; there was one in particular (for twenty pounds I wouldn't mention its name) which gave me perhaps the most moving communion with noble human passion that I have ever received from literature. There were evenings when I was positively transformed; while I sat and listened I became far more capable of reckless generosity and shining bravery and proud self-sacrifice than I was at

other times. These are deep experiences. Or again we returned, we constantly returned and never too often, to the prodigious gorgeous world of Dickens – where experience is wide, illimitably spacious rather than mysteriously deep; with Dickens I forgot my higher nature, I was lost in the breathing thronging entrancing crowd. But I was wrong in saying that I forgot the room, our friend's rather dull little study, into which we packed for these beautiful sessions; for I find that room, with its book-shelves and great writing-table and scattered chairs, still inextricably tangled in memory with the vision of Mrs. Nickleby and the Blimbers and the sinister convict in the churchyard. Oh he did make them live – his reading was superbly dramatic. The very earth, when the hour was over and we clattered down to prayers in the library, was the larger for it.

One evening, when prayers were accomplished, instead of dismissing us with his good-night as usual, he announced a further entertainment. Grouped about him at prayers was his family of tall sons and daughters, such of them as chanced to be at home for the moment. They were all our friends; but one of them, a daughter, we didn't often see, because she followed her profession away in the world and was only free to return to us now and then. We knew her fame, however; she was a musician, a noted violinist; and this evening she happened to be amongst us, and she had offered to play to us on her violin before we went to bed. So she stood up in front of our assembly, and all alone, without

accompaniment, she began to play. I wonder what it was that she played – I wonder if I have ever heard it played since that evening; perhaps you may recognise it from my description. It was, then, a piece of music that at first, like other music, made you think of many things – of the faces of those who sat round, of all that you had done that day, of your plans for to-morrow; it opened in that manner, as music so often does. There was something in it too that fixed your attention upon the performer, that made you study her appearance, her attitude, the swing of her arm, and then the flicker and quiver of the fingers of her left hand on the strings. Still this isn't enough to identify that piece of music among others; but now comes its peculiarity. Presently, unawares, I was floating, flying, soaring, loose from the world, borne aloft in liberation, in a warmth of glory – seeing and feeling and knowing with a strange clarity – knowing everything, but by a revelation direct, not in words. So it went on, for an immense lapse of time; and then at last it hovered and sank and came to an end – a sudden end, leaving me still in the air for an almost painful drop to the earth, by myself, some moments after it had ceased. It should be possible for somebody to name that piece of music from my description; it was most remarkable. And so it must have appeared to the rest of us, for I was sent next day by some of our leaders to ask Miss Lucy to play to us again. I was very shy – it seemed much to ask; but I saw, to my genuine surprise, that the kind young lady was pleased. She played

to us again. All those tall sons and daughters, with their delicate graceful mother, were very good to us; they had quiet courteous ways, like their father.

But with all this I am not getting on with my studies in school, and I wanted to see whether our old friend ever dropped into poetry over our construings save in that one curious episode of 'Eheu fugaces.' I fear not; I couldn't have forgotten it if he had. I think in general he demanded too much of us in our daily tussle with the ancient words; he expected us to hack and hew our way to victory by a frontal attack. He kept us blindly beating against the well-defended page, when perhaps we might have slipped round and turned its flank by a nimble movement – and we could be nimble, it was brute force that we very naturally lacked. It was his idea that we should batter away at the language until we came out on the other side – to join him at last, the struggle over, on the asphodel of classic culture. I doubt whether he ascribed any peculiar virtue to the discipline of the strife itself, to the study of the tough old tongues for the sake of their toughness; it surely wasn't in the tradition of his day to talk of 'mental gymnastic' when we beat our heads upon the page. I have already invoked the memory of his day and his school; he was the apologist of the classics who looked straight away to the far reward, who saw the young construer finally perfected in taste, elegantly versifying, aptly quoting; with such a prospect assured there was no need to justify the pains of construing on other

grounds. When the young idiot broke his head in vain after all – or when it appeared that a dozen did so for one who secured the prize – then, as I imagine, the modern apologist turned round, pointed to the broken heads and declared them stronger and wiser for these honourable scars; so that it mattered little if the fight did end in a defeat, for the fight itself was clearly a precious experience. Is this what happened? At any rate our friend, I am sure, wasn't troubled to praise our pains for their intrinsic value; he continued to look ahead, and he offered us the ancient books, not as instruments of helpful discipline, but as treasured possessions to be won, like other treasures, by toil and tribulation.

But of course it wasn't only the classics that we studied; all learning was our province, from 'Greek Testament' in the early morning to 'equations' after breakfast, from 'Smith's Rome' at noon to 'science' at dusk; and if there was anything left over it was swept into a 'general knowledge paper' once a week. For my part I never liked the great vague talkative subjects like 'divinity' or 'English history,' where one gets lost in an aimless drift of information on which the memory can nowhere bite. I always preferred my learning crisp and short, with trim dictated 'notes' that could be got by heart, honest answers to plain questions. I should have made a laudable young Pharisee in the schools of Judæa; I could far more easily have become word-perfect in the Pentateuch than I could learn to 'discuss

the bearing' or 'trace the development' of things. I toiled in the wake of those to whom discussing and tracing came more readily; but I caught up again in Latin verses, and I even became quite skilful in fitting together the neat mosaic of 'sense' and 'epithets' which results in a copy of elegiacs. Our friend wrote beautiful verses himself – not that I could well savour their style, but I admired the suavely flowing and graceful hand in which he copied them out; from his handwriting alone he could be esteemed a poet. And however far we might be carried in the quest of other subjects, back we came again, day in, day out, to the humaner letters, to the declension and the paradigm; and there was the old scholar standing before the blackboard, with his gold spectacles and his fringe of iron-grey curls – the very picture of a man of culture, mellow and legendary, nourished for a lifetime upon the sages and poets of antiquity.

And what he really did for us, I now perceive, was simply that he looked like that, *was* that; he taught us, and taught us more than I can measure, by merely living and moving in the perfume of noble letters. Nothing in the world is more catching, when the sensitive young are exposed to it; stealing into the mind, insidiously clinging there, it spreads into the furthest corners, into unsuspected crannies; and I may or may not be a budding poet, one who greedily absorbs the stuff that feeds a young imagination, one who is to flower on his own account in due season; but in any

case the lingering perfume, caught from another when I was ten years old, will hang on in the recesses of my stiffening narrowing mind, and a few sweet traces of it will remain when my mind is at length set fast in the solemnity or the triviality of the prime of life. It isn't much, you may think, to show for the long labours of my education; I agree that it isn't much, and I maintain that it might have been more. But it wasn't my fault if our masters held too scrupulously to their antique legend; and at least they gave me this, even if they largely gave it by accident and oversight – this, that I still remember the delicate dry fragrance which is about the path of an elegantly quoting and versifying scholar. It may not be in *my* line; I may often declare that all that rubbish of Greek and Latin was a sheer waste of time in a stern competitive world. But you mustn't in that case listen only to my language; for it still happens to me as to Bishop Blougram – there comes a 'sunset-touch, a fancy from a flower-bell,' and I recall the scholar's absent-minded chant of the far-away music with a singular stirring of envy. Tagging to and fro at my business in a competitive world, do I find the world so lovely that I needn't envy the old man that refreshment, those resources? For an occasional moment in my dusty prime, as I stare at the headlines of the evening paper in the suburban train, the mournful lament returns to me sweetly and tenderly – Postume, Postume! It is better than nothing, if it isn't much.

But what, I dream! – for *I* fared better than this, my

budding fancy blossomed in the liberal air, I was duly a poet. I was an inferior poet to some of my friends, one or two of whom had a splendid abundant free-flowering genius – mine was always painfully forced. But in one fashion or another we responded, not a few of us, to the boon of great literature that was revealed in the old man's looks and ways. Not in entire uncomeliness, not in utter clownishness we passed out of his hands; we had a standard, we knew the tone of the man who frequents the Muses. We may presently have grown to think it very mild, very dim and antiquated; for if one is classic and austere at ten or twelve, be sure that one is faint with exquisite languors at fifteen. Yet the memory stayed, the gift of this old man. We left him and passed on our journeys; he let us depart with a quiet benediction, and perhaps none of us saw much of him ever after. To be demonstrative in his care of us, to be insistent in his influence, to follow us on our journeys with open solicitude – these were not his ways; there was a grave gleam of emotion and good will as he said good-bye, and then he turned to his books, humming a tuneful air, and was ready for the new young plants confided to his keeping. I left him seated at the big writing-table in his study, whence he looked out over the sloping lawn and the ilex-grove to the blue line of the summer sea. We didn't miss each other after we had parted; neither at twelve nor at sixty is the parting of friends any great agitation of the inner man; the time when a friend can trouble our deeper feelings hadn't

yet arrived for me, it had long passed for him. But we parted in mutual kindness, and he gave me a little volume of his own poems for a token.

Such he was – Edward Daniel Stone, for many years a master at Eton, and then for many years head of a private school on the coast of Kent. He had been trained at Eton, he belonged to Eton heart and soul; but he was of the past, he lived in the twilight of another day, and he mightn't have felt easily at home in our full noon at Eton. Yet what do I know, after all? – for I notice this once more, that the old scholar of his sort, live in the shade though he may, isn't confused or enraged by the modern glare. It is a mark in his character that can't be missed; you may begin by thinking him a shy recluse, certain to be discomposed by the scuffle and bustle of our newer ways; and you end by perceiving, not perhaps that he enjoys them, but that he regards them critically and calmly, and that his opinion, when he proposes it, is penetrating. Sometimes it looks as though he were less easily disconcerted by life at large, life in the open, than the newer men of louder voices. There was nothing schoolboyish, to be sure, in this old friend of ours; he took it for granted that a man grows up with years. Nor is it to be thought that his maturity isn't wholesome for his flock; it isn't his kind, nor a good grave head like his, that makes us solemn beyond our age, precocious little wretches who fancy ourselves grown-up. No, as I bid him good-bye and receive his valedictory blessing I look up to him sin-

cerely; I know myself ignorant and small, a light scrap of youthfulness beneath his wise old eye; and if I have learned my own measure it is because he has always shown me reason. Here is gratitude, I can say again; I offer it with both hands.

VI

BUT how was it – I ask myself in some perplexity – that the old scholar grew so wise and fine upon the classics that he loved, upon Greek and Latin as he loved them? The distinction of his mind was unmistakably classical; for though his culture was wide, though it spread freely away from the closed garden of the ancients, still the home of his spirit was in that serener world – serener as it is to our eyes at least, because it lies there in the unchangeable past. What did he bring after all from that distant scene, calm in immortality, to give such silvery tones to his thinking and reasoning and discoursing? It is hard to understand; for indeed we can't without a question accept that old apology for the classical training, that pleasing theory of which I have spoken – concerning the all-sufficiency of the classical ensample, how it impels the scholar, when he has taken it to heart, ever after to distinguish the fine from the base in all things. That won't do, it is certain: not, I dare say, because the ensample isn't high enough, if we take and make it ours as it stands; but because my old scholar never did take it as it stands – he changed it, he adapted it to his liking, before ever he made it his own. We may behold him, the scholar of his day,

fashioning the classics according to his taste, then forming his taste upon the gracious beauty he has fashioned. It appears an odd proceeding. Yet this was surely the manner of it; and I hardly know where it may take us, following it, before we reach the answer to my puzzled question: how was it that he thrived so finely upon his transmuted classics? Neither question nor answer, however, will take me far from Eton, which is all my story.

It strikes me, then, that Greek and Latin were laid under a singular spell when they were loved by scholars of taste at Eton. A charm was blown upon the old books; many of their voices were hushed beneath it, and those that were still heard were the flute-notes, the clearer and the sweeter for their loneliness. Greek and Latin, that were once the tongues of nations – Greek and Latin, that were once a tumultuous crash of new ideas, wild adventures, furious ambitions and desires – dwindled to a gush of melody that thrilled through the scholar's ilex-grove, never deranging or disquieting it. He was able to forget the rest. Greek and Latin were books to him, purely books; and there is always this about a book, that it can't interrupt you, can't protest to you as you read it; and there is this too, that you need never read it all. I think how it now seems to us that even the whole of all the books, not their choicer pages only, is but the prelude of intercourse with the old nations; how the books are only the first things to be ransacked, before you begin to rummage in the soil, in

the litter and refuse of the old life – wherever you may pick up a hint of the manner in which life was once alive. The ancient melody pipes to us sweetly by the way, but it is the full deep everyday rumour of work and strife and argument that excites us; we glue our ears to the ground in the hope of overhearing it. Not at Eton, I believe, was that research first heard of; there the scholar was content to open the well-known well-loved book – as it might be the cedarn box in which the poet was imprisoned, according to the pretty tale. 'Now lift the lid a moment,' sang the scholar of 'Ionica' to the prisoner – 'now, Dorian shepherd, speak!' And so the shepherd spoke, and the two minds flowing together, the English and the Greek, held a charmed communion in which the old life was a dream, a romance, a vision of clear sunshine – no everyday toil and noise.

The scholar listened and heard what he loved to hear; I don't think he vexed himself to distinguish the strains that didn't please him. Losing myself once more in our youthful days, I see that the poets and sages, however they were masked by their tough-grained grammar, wore a general expression that was neither harsh nor unfamiliar; as our construing grew more fluent we began to discern them, or to think we did, and we saw them blander, more affable, more at home in courteous company at Eton than I seem to see them now. We patronised them a little; we recognised with kindness that they were often wistful and appealing – as though they mildly urged that it was not their fault if they lived

in those strange times. They appeared to excuse and extenuate their antiquity. I am sure that in the air and manner of our studies, while we listened to our masters, there was a tone that encouraged the old authors to feel as much at their ease in the nineteenth century, in a christian land, as they must wish to feel; they were treated with sympathy for betraying so natural a desire. Of course it was admitted that some of them were awkward figures in our midst, perhaps impossible – these were no favourites; and even the best had their lapses, their moods and fits of obstinate antiquity – perhaps to be condoned, at the worst to be quietly ignored. But on the whole the classic writers were formed into an elect company as we advanced to meet them, and they seemed to make Eton their home. It was a singular feat, when all is said; for you observe that it was not a mere matter of checking their boldness, restraining their rudeness, to spare the feelings of the young construers. The classics were well trimmed to fit our schoolbooks, of course; but the kindly sunny treatment under which the old authors became so affably Etonian, this was another affair, one in which our masters had followed their own preference from of old. They had liked to treat the poets and sages with kindness; they had liked the pleasant tone of domesticity which their kindness evoked.

I wish I could illustrate the effect I have in mind, but it was all so diffused throughout our schooling that it is hard to seize it in one moment. It will be easier to point

a contrast, describing another mode of dealing with the ancients, and I shall soon do so. But first consider this – how curiously the influence of the Greeks and the Romans declared itself in our courteous scholars; we know well how it did, but so well that the oddity may escape us. What should we expect of the mind of a man who has steeped his thought in converse with the Greeks? Don't think for the moment of the old scholar before us. Think of a passionately vivid and eager young nation, audacious in experiment, leaping out of the shadowy past – and see how it launches its bold questions, strikes off into the high air of thought and reason, showers out new shapes of beauty, new and ever newer, like the first springtime of the world. That is an amazing sight. And it all happens so quickly, in a few rapid centuries – a mere springtime; the world is changed for good and all by the flash of genius that has leaped out from the shores and islands of a corner of blue sea. To any one who has watched and wondered at the marvel, the sudden bound of liberal thought that disturbed the immemorial patience of mankind, it must appear impossible to be patient, acquiescent, content with the ruling of tradition again for ever; it may indeed be dangerous to love the Greeks, and a menace to the peace of any mind – so unscrupulously, so sceptically you must begin to question men and things, from earth to heaven and down again. To what purpose have you loved those adventurers of genius if you aren't a terror to all quiet minds? Others may dream and moon in

repose upon a time-approved culture; but the learned Grecian is a man, he must be, of a restless and realistic temper, keen, mobile, immodest, grasping the good gift of life with avid hands. There is an image indeed of the scholar of Eton!

And as for his Roman studies, I find it even harder to make a Roman of him than to make a Greek. Nothing prosaic, nothing austerely rude and republican about our scholar; nor is he anything of an imperialist, applauding the advance of Cæsar's eagles. The spirit in which he ensues the classics is at least exceedingly eclectic. He takes to himself a little here, a little there; and if I try to discern the principle of his choice I can only conclude that he found it a great deal nearer home than the Ægean or the Tyrrhene sea. He found it in a green and pleasant land, peaceful under the elms of a well-watered valley – where the grey towers and russet roofs harmoniously talk to you in no strange words, in the tongue you have spoken from your childhood. That is the tone of Eton's culture; it was nourished slowly by temperate northern suns, not by an outlandish blaze and drouth. English it is – which is as much as to say romantic, rather shy, not scientific, not bent on argument, instinctively conservative. The Greeks and the Romans indeed were remarkably trimmed and chastened before they could settle down in the valley of the Thames. Would they know themselves again? They would recognise a strain of their melody here and there, and some few of them, on a summer afternoon

beneath the elms, might be reminded of their young and distant days, not unhappily. But when you think how our old friend has passed his life with them in loving familiarity you must admire the placid integrity of his English worth. It can't be shaken by unsettling company. Thus far and no farther, up to the mark that English taste determines, the influence of the southern adventurers is received and welcomed; and what is more it genially fructifies, it works for the sweetening and mellowing of English taste. But all the forces of antiquity are powerless to thrust our Eton an inch beyond her fixed intention. With gentle obstinacy she makes her point. The unruly ancients are to respect the line she draws: that first – and then let them influence her for all the good they can.

Now for my contrast, that is to illuminate these oddities from another angle. There could indeed be seen no greater contrast, had I the means to describe it, than was exhibited at Eton before our time by the poet of 'Ionica,' by William Cory himself. He in his day was a figure at Eton like none other. He might seem to have arrived there in the very company of the antique band; and unlike his fellow-pilgrims, more recalcitrant than Sophocles, less amenable than Virgil, he stayed as a stranger and a sojourner for his day – a day memorable for his presence, but it came to an end, and his keen and uneasy genius had never truly found or made its peace at Eton. There was no help for it, either in Eton or in himself – no possible accordance, finally, between the

spirit of the place that must think safely, step warily, count each risk, and the man who can do nothing of the sort. The poet offered himself up to Eton with all his heart, he lavished on those who could receive it the gift of his ardent and penetrating thought; his was beyond a question the richest, the strongest, the most original mind of which Eton has ever had experience. There was a chance! – and indeed it was a chance that brought to a few, I suppose a few only, a romance of intellectual awakening that they were never to forget; but it was a chance, on the whole it must be said, inevitably missed. Eton's one contact with genius was a failure in the end – a failure it must seem by comparison with all that it might have meant for Eton. And are we to say that it couldn't be helped, and so to leave it? The spirit of the place, so honourable as it is, so well-meaning, so deeply confused in its ideas, hasn't pierced the difficulty, hasn't thought it out; and indeed it is a difficulty – how to bring safety to accord with danger, where neither alone will make good schooling. Can anybody guide us to the right solution? That is the question; let us fling it out and hope to catch it again later on, before it drops. Meanwhile I glance away from Eton once more; but not far, only to our good sister at Cambridge – to King's.

There was a Kingsman years ago – he died in 1908 – who lives in many memories as a poet, though it was a queer and abrupt and almost inarticulate poetry that was in him. Walter Headlam, Fellow of King's, was

hardly more than a young man when he died; but a longer life could never have aged him. The bright glare of his humorous eye, wide open, as though he were startled anew by every signal of the beauty or drollery of the world; and his pause of glee over the discovery, his explosive utterance, his sudden gasp of appreciation; and his rapt silence of delight, gleaming in absorption as he drank in the wonder of the moment – the sight of the morning in the fields, the memory of a cadence of old verse, the recognition of a friend: in all this he was uncontrollably youthful, and not with the youth that time and experience may touch. He didn't belong to time; he might have been equally at home – or equally lost and startled – in every age and place; and time for him wasn't an even and maturing flow – it was more like a fitful assault, a dropping fire of chance from all quarters. And as for experience, his deep sensibility was exposed to it, but he wasn't and couldn't have been moulded or fashioned by it in a formal style; he seemed to face a fresh and entirely disconnected adventure whenever he left his door. I have seen no one who appeared to turn so open a mind upon the day: not of set purpose, but as though there had been no yesterday, or he had forgotten it. He forgot everything, forgot the hours and the days as he sat among his books, reading and reading; and a call into the open brought him out bewildered, staring wildly and comically; and then he caught up at last with the new discovery of the day, and plunged into chuckling enjoyment of it. His

warm human zest attached him closely to life; but for all his desirous soul he could never have been part of an age and a place, of any in which he happened to find himself. Life was his, but not one life, not a life just there and then, circled by conditions.

This was the man whose converse with ancient Greece – day by day, night by night, while time ignored him – seemed of a character perfectly different from any other with which we were acquainted. I needn't say that I couldn't dream of measuring his achievement; I only know the renown of his scholarship, that before his untimely death was already international among scholars. But any of his pupils may remember, as I do, the singular sense of newness that spread over the whole question of the Greek books when he began to talk about them. They were other than we had ever known them before; all their long association with the school and the schoolmaster dropped away from them suddenly, as we sat and listened to him – listened, watched, while he restlessly ranged and jerked and hesitated amidst the litter of books on the floor, on all the tables and chairs of his chaotic rooms. What we usually call a good teacher he certainly was not; he had no ready answers and no flowing explanations, no notes to dictate; he paused and stammered, he rushed headlong at his discourse, he was embarrassed by all the upthrusting ideas that caught at him in passing. He planted himself upon the hearthrug – rubicund, wild-haired, eagerly staring; and at last, at the right moment – which might

or might not come to-day, might be hastened if we challenged or provoked him cleverly, there was no knowing – but anyhow at the right moment he was off, and he talked with relish, with vibrating sonority, with a leaping flame of enthusiasm; and while he talked of the old books and the old poets he seemed to dash into a real world, not a world of books and poets calm in immobility – and he was alive with their own temper, interpreting a world that stirred and jostled in his memory. It was very new. I remember how the language of the Greeks, for the first and only time in all my schooling, appeared as a language that men might have casually talked, bandied in conversation without knowing the rules. This man seemed hardly to know the rules himself; he knew them as talk, the talk of a poet or a sage in his cloister, the talk of a crowd in the street who weren't aware that they were talking a classical tongue.

And so it was Walter Headlam, when we reached him at Cambridge, who revealed the working of the spell that had been laid upon the classics, how they had been soothed and enthralled before we were presented to them. In the light of a mind not only sensitive and poetic but entirely open, thrown wide without the shade of a reserve, the old books changed their look in a twinkling; and to me, I dare say to many or most of us, the surprise was complete. How shall I define the change? The old books and their authors stood out in clearer harsher outline, piercing the haze of English poetry and English sensibility that had hung around

them hitherto. Clearer, more crudely defined, and at the same time less accessible: it appeared that a young Etonian would have to drop a good many of the habits of his mind if he hoped to come to terms with them. You may smile – but it is true that after some ten years of steady education I discovered the fact with a shock, the fact that an arduous leap of imagination is required of us for the understanding of the classics. Among many a difficulty I hadn't heard of that, so it seems. I had thought of the ancient writers, not as strangers and foreigners, but as belonging to us in a particular manner, by some right of possession on our part which placed them under our special care; and so they were of a different order entirely from any modern Æschylus or Virgil, talking a modern language from overseas. And now I knew my mistake. Far away on his ancient eminence, alien and singular, attending to his own thought in his own world – there was Æschylus, utterly regardless of our pleasant Thames-side culture. If the distance between us is to be bridged, the whole of the undertaking must be ours; we must go the whole journey, every step of the way, to join him in his meditation. And even Virgil – Virgil so evidently ill at ease in all that pagan riot, casting his wistful looks, outstretching his appealing hands – must we say that even on Virgil our kindness is lost, for it isn't after all to Eton that he appeals and yearns? Well, there it is: this blank clear light, so turned upon antiquity, startled a young Etonian into new thought on many a question

comfortably closed till then. I am not to claim that he passionately or perseveringly betook himself to thought; I dare say he relaxed the unwonted effort soon enough. But the shock of the surprise was genuine, and it still sends me back with a salutation to the author of it, to Walter Headlam.

VII

I HAVE strayed too far from Eton after all. Our sister at Cambridge, the other college of our Founder, has her own right and natural aspirations, and they aren't of necessity the same as Eton's. At Cambridge, very properly, study is disinterested; it looks beyond the moment to the vast of truth, to the discovery of the undiscovered; and what you may find in those uncharted spaces, the nature and the use of the trophy you bring back, this is of secondary concern to Cambridge – whose first and chief anxiety is that light should be shed where no light was before. Cambridge, therefore, loves to think that a man should throw his mind into his researches without reserve, for their own sake only; and whether their effect upon himself is to civilise and beautify him, or whether they have not this effect but some other, anyhow the man is honoured in the mere fact that the cause of discovery is advanced. That is quite clear. It means that the task of the university – (or rather one side of its task, for of course there are the undergraduates to be beautified, not only the dons to be honoured, and it is a question how the two sides of the task are to be smoothly and practically adjusted; so it may be that at Cambridge the cult of learning has its

own embarrassment, and can't pursue a single end with all that lofty indifference, that disdain of the world that I was wishful to admire) – but at any rate it means, as I was saying, that the task of Eton can never be disinterested exploration. The blank light of open inquiry won't be admissible at Eton; for there, whatever happens, the little victims mustn't be discharged in a ferocious condition. The school exists for no other purpose than to form their ways, and no mind that is bent upon them can be cleared of that reserve. The studies of the young folk must lead them naturally into the world that awaits them, not away from it, whatever happens.

Our tearful prayerful Founder, flourishing his sceptre in school-yard, may wonder indeed what has come to the poor scholars and sad priests of his college, what profane ambition has possessed them. If he watches the faces of the children as they assemble for absence, he must shrink in shyness, not to say in horror, before the easy assurance of their looks; all too clear it is that they aren't taught to dread the world. Our talk of grateful homage to Henry the gentle and hapless, the star-crossed king, must truly sound ironic; what has he to say to this bouncing progeny, born to England in such amplitude of all the good things of the earth, that inundates the retreat which his charity and piety designed for a very different brood? It is written all over our Eton that life is not to be refused, not to be despised when it is ample and honourable. Don't be deceived, I say again, by the

unworldly airs of ancient romance that breathe on us at Eton in the shade of the huge grey chapel. Our virtue, whatever it may be, is neither fugitive nor cloistered; no painful yearning for the unknowable and ineffable torments us here. The good earth is open to us, good enough for us; and there we are to accept our destiny – why indeed should we quarrel with it? Our masters at Eton won't help us to quarrel with it, not even the most retiring, the most twilight-loving amongst them. I seem in truth to remember that not many of them in my time had an appearance of loving the twilight; on the whole they were plainly attached to the sun and the holiday afternoon. But even the most enshaded had their view of the great fortunate world, a view in which its palms and prizes weren't disparaged; or perhaps I should rather call it a view of hopeful and heroic youth – youth that will win the palms of the world and wear them with modesty and grace. Success before men – however lightly you hold it in the void you must desire it for the youthful hero whom it crowns so becomingly; and in one way or another there is honour at Eton for success, no doubt.

I have a picture, as it happens, that will show how it is honoured most poetically: a small picture which brings us back to pleasant company, that of the old Horatian scholar of the grove by the coast of Kent. It chances opportunely that he pays a visit to Eton on a summer evening, seeks me out (as one lately a pupil of his grove) and takes me for a stroll in the playing-fields. By this

time I am larger beside him than of old; but we drop into the same old strain of good sound talk and we enjoy the evening. We wander in the playing-fields, we turn down Poet's Walk toward Sixth Form Bench, by the shining sliding river; and presently we fall in with some friend of ours who tells us that he has just been meeting and greeting – whom, do you think? – a very celebrated person, once the most brilliant of Eton boys, now a man of high and public position in the world, a statesman, and not only a statesman but almost everything else of which ambition dreams. This man – even I know all about him – is one of the great figures among the living in our annals; he is the type and fulfilment of qualities truly classical, for to the honours of the world he adds the ornament of culture, and he conciliates not the Muses only but the crowd; he fills the popular eye, he compels the critical mind, he is fortune's favourite – the 'magnificent man,' no less, of the Athenian sage. And it appears that he too is revisiting Eton this evening, is strolling in the playing-fields of his brilliant youth, is actually just over there, across Sheep's Bridge, meditatively pacing, serenely enjoying his memories in an hour that he has snatched from the splendid claims of his vocation. His name is mentioned; and the light that beams in the look of the venerable scholar, hearing the name, is most poetic.

'Ah, I knew him when he was a boy – and a charming boy he was!' The old man had been a master at Eton when this rare creature of promise, young Pericles him-

self, had passed through the school; they hadn't met since then, and here was a lucky chance that had brought them both to Eton again on the same evening – the boy who had crowned his promise in the world, the schoolmaster who had grown old in the seclusion of his grove. Duly effacing myself, I watched them as they met on Sheep's Bridge. There on one side was Pericles, now in the fullness of his comely and decorate life; he threw up his hands in pleasure and recognition, with a gesture that was gracious as became his greatness, deferential as became the memory of his boyishness; for he was a schoolboy again, bright in the prime of promise, when he caught sight of this revered old figure of the past, and yet he was also a great man in the world, affably recalling and saluting a mild recluse. And on the other side, there was the aged mentor, he who remains behind in the shadow when the heroes of his training wave him their gay good-bye and spring forth into the sun – he who watches their triumph, applauds them unheard, and is content to take for his own reward the mere echo of the acclamation which is theirs. He has given whatever he had to give – ('they'll say, who know the truth') – given his best to the service of youth and freedom; and it is a pleasant thing to see him step forward and hail the charming boy who is now the goodly statesman. A poetic glimpse indeed: and if one brings the right imagination to it a glimpse that is eloquent of the history of Eton.

It was different in my time; but in the days of which

these two were happily reminding each other, 'mid-Victorian' days, the Eton master was pleased to think of himself, and with reason thought of himself, as the trainer of the youth of heroes. The ardent and generous stripling, you remember, was placed in the story under the care of the wise old monster Chiron – only monster is a harsh word for the oddly formed but infinitely faithful and kindly creature; and Chiron, little fitted in his uncouthness to shine conspicuous on his own account, lavished his stores of wisdom and experience on the boy, tried him with rigorous discipline, inspired him to be dauntless in effort, lofty in resolve; and Chiron at length dismissed the fine tall youth – whom indeed he couldn't have detained a moment longer – and stood at the door of his sequestered cave with a blessing, and I dare say a tear of regret and pride, for a last sight of the yellow-haired light-stepping hero – who for his part was blithe to be gone, though he waved a grateful and affectionate good-bye to the old creature as he disappeared. It is an appealing tale, and I don't wonder if in many an age the faithful Chiron has cheered himself with the thought of it; for as he turns back to his cave again it must seem rather dull and dim without the liveliness of that bright head, and solitary aches and regrets are sweetened if one recalls that they are the poetry of all ages. Even so, says Chiron to himself: the Grecian tale is brought to pass again by the Thames, and who shall say that it isn't as fair, as rare as ever? Shall not a fond and obscure old creature uplift his

heart, remembering that he has given his best to the nurture of Jason and Achilles?

The poet of 'Ionica,' it was he who shaped this notion of the schoolmaster's office into the form of romance and bequeathed it to Eton. To him with his unquiet genius there was consolation in the fancy; and he needed to be consoled, for his imperious and incisive speech was the disguise of a spirit so restless in its hunger that it drove him – sent him wandering like a ghost beneath the elms of the playing-fields, blank and solitary in the loss of his companions, as the world took them away from him year by year. He turned in his loneliness to the comfort of poetry: a slender vein of it, but true and rare, with a pulse of emotion beating in it – mournful emotion too near to pain, too clear-sighted in disillusionment, to be felt as a sentimental joy. 'Ionica,' from which I quoted a line just now, is a small book, not flawless; but as the confession and testament of a schoolmaster it surely has a golden finality. A man of bold reason who wasn't afraid of poetry, a romantic lover of youth who was all too sharply aware that youth can't stay, can't wait to be adored; so that he couldn't bemuse himself in a mere haze of dreams, he couldn't blind his fancy: this man voiced the thought of all those, they must be many, who have felt of the reward of the schoolmaster that it is bitterly mixed. To give so much and to get so much, to give with mind and heart and to get so much in return to fill them both – and then to lose so much, to be always losing: it is the schoolmaster's

portion, who stays behind while youth that is life and work to him is always in flight. If the man who is left behind can make poetry of his loss, who shall grudge it him? – the more there is of it the better, if poetry it is. And indeed it is, here at Eton: a small volume of it, quiet and exquisite and just, declaring the pride of a lover of youth, and the ache in the pride. Such was the gift that William Cory left to Eton, the place where his difficult spirit could not rest.

If it has happened that in later days this picturesque legend of master and boy has been forgotten, or passed in silence, the reason may be that it is too quickly vulgarised. In the hands of a poet it is well; but you may shudder to recall the manner of it when somebody else takes it up. There is the right Athenian grace, that touches the prettiness of the picture with moderation, keeping it cool and clear; and then there is a different style, where such a little thing, a shade of luxuriance, a quiver of lacrymosity, spoils it all. To hold the perfect tone is to balance on a hair's-breadth; and perhaps when you have seen the balance lost, seen the depth of falsity into which sentiment drops like a stone, you fly off in horror to less precarious fancies. It isn't surprising; for we all know the anguish of the spectacle when the poet's truth and beauty are aped by somebody else. And so, I dare say, we don't find that poetry, which can't be dead, is easily suffered to speak in later and brisker days at Eton. No great matter for that, maybe; for it is certain that it can't be dead, however dumb, and I

suppose it takes care of itself; it thrills in silence, let us hope, when the ghost of Ionicus wanders again by Fellow's Pond, watches a new generation of Eton's youth and finds it reassuringly like the old. And yet there is a loss, and it seems a misfortune if the old Greek story is shyly ignored; for there are other falsities into which sentiment tumbles, not only that one of a too effusive luxury. The story I have told has a singular boon in a retreat like Eton, where the voices of the world are never beyond a short earshot. Eton knows so well the noise of success, of fortune and good cheer, that another and less confident tune of music, stealing into a summer evening by the river-bank, isn't amiss. A little fine melody is good for the ear and keeps it true.

It keeps it true, not only in the affair of sentiment, but in another – in the louder affair of Eton's commerce with success. Eton, that lies so near the frequented highway of life, is exposed to a danger; and it may be a wholesome risk in many ways, but it isn't one that we can afford to disregard. I think of some of our old friends among the masters of the school, figures of independence, upholding the genius of Eton; and the thought of them reminds me how they stood against the danger of which I speak. They saw it, of course; they knew that the traffic of the highway, resounding at such close quarters, might easily derange a genius that is really more at home in a deeper seclusion. The spirit of a school doesn't wish to esteem the rewards of

life at their vulgar value; left to itself, it has its own manner of reckoning their worth – a worth that isn't in them by nature, for they owe it to the sons of the school who go forth to win and wear them. You see what I mean: Eton takes not the slightest interest in the prize-giving world, save only as it fulfils the destiny of these sons; it is they, the sons, who give a value to the world, never the world to them. This is Eton's own attitude and natural bearing toward success in the highway – isn't it? Some of our old friends certainly thought so; they wouldn't have Eton perturbed and distracted from her independent ways by any mundane noise. If life is good enough for our children, so much the better for life: that is the poetic manner of appraising the glory that awaits young Jason, and our ears are attuned to it, as I say, by the clear strain of that melody in the twilight. And now I know the door I shall next open and the threshold I shall cross, pursuing this wandering search for the genius of the place.

VIII

THE door of the Vice-Provost is in the Cloisters; and he occupies, you can't call it a house, but the portion assigned to him of the mass of old building that embraces the green plot in the midst – the green close into which you peer through high iron rails, as you pass through the Cloisters on your way to the playing-fields. The College Pump, the flight of steps that ascend to College Hall, and then a low dark door: there you are. On the first floor, above the arches of the cloister-walk, the Gallery runs round two sides of the square; the Gallery, hung with the portraits of our famous men, the long clear Gallery with its air of antique and scholastic refinement, is common to the various lodgings of the Fellows – one of whom is the Vice-Provost. The daily business of the school is remote from these quiet rooms and corridors; to me, when I was admitted to penetrate them, they always seemed hushed in a stately calm; and life was high and cool, days were spacious, for the venerable officers of our realm in this retirement. The chime of the great clock in Lupton's Tower is here like a solemn blessing pronounced upon serenity, day and night, four times an hour – that chime which in the scramble of the school clanged its quarters in warning

or reproach. It was always strange, as one entered the Gallery, to perceive how the school dropped away into the distance, leaving room for distinguished lives, quiet voices and reposeful manners, so near to our stir and rout, yet so far from it. I have said that under certain roofs of Eton one was aware of a blessed difference, a new conception of the right thing and the wrong in human nature; and I now add that the roof under which this change was to be enjoyed at its finest and sweetest was that of the Vice-Provost of my time – of Francis Warre-Cornish.

He appeared to me older than any age. He may, when I knew him first, have been approaching sixty; but by the side of such men as the Provost and the Head, I suppose his seniors, he seemed as the frail survivor of a generation of which all but he had vanished. Light and slight, a little bowed, smitten with silver upon his thin locks; with a look in his kindly eye that wandered past you, away from you; with a voice so quiet, speech so unobtrusive that any irruption of the coarse moment was enough to drown it: so the Vice-Provost comes back to me from those years, when I first had the fortune to know him. To me as a boy it was indeed hardly possible to think of engaging and talking to him; for he came and went, he passed like a light dry breeze, he wasn't decidedly there or positively anywhere; and his low small words, that slipped into sound and out again before you knew that he was speaking, made a shy youth feel awkward and tentative – as though one

grabbed at a feather floating in the breeze, and always clumsily missed it. I was aware of being too convulsive for such fine intercourse, yet too slow; my best response, blurted forth, fell on mere emptiness; for already the topic was elsewhere, not where I had seen it a second before, and the Vice-Provost was gone with it. But it didn't matter – he wasn't vexed; for a moment he played with the fancy at a distance, more soundless than ever, and if no one overtook him he dropped it – he had got what he wished of it without anybody's help. The movement of his glance and his attention might appear to be vague, he might come and go as though in absent-minded detachment; but even a rather bewildered youth could soon see that while the rest of the party made their noise, it was the Vice-Provost – though his eye wandered away, though he seemed to be hardly there at all unless you looked for him – who noted, measured, pierced and criticised the whole of it.

Let me draw the scene. And first the room in which we sat: the long room, with its two high windows at the end that looked through trees to the river, was such as I had never seen or known before – only excepting another room at Eton, very soon to be visited again. Dimly and softly hued, yet full of colour, blue like a mist and green like a forest, the drawing-room of the Cornishes wore distinction with no effort, as if it were everyday wear. It seemed to me a place in which beauty was somehow assumed and taken for granted; it appeared to pass as a matter of course that life has need

of beauty, a natural and workaday need. It isn't paraded or shown off, in this manner of being; it is around you, behind you, wherever it happens, noticed or unnoticed, while you talk and think and work. Did I know the name of William Morris when I first entered that soft-shaded room? I forget – perhaps I first heard it there. Anyhow the pomegranates of Morris were on the walls, his glowing tulips were on the chairs or in the hangings; and however little I understood, I knew that it was an air and mood of beauty fresh to my experience. I can't describe, I couldn't exaggerate the romance of the discovery. Say what you will, there remains this magic in the touch of the genius of Morris, that it brings you strangeness and rarity into your own life, the life that *you* lead; and you aren't called to stop and stare and exclaim, you haven't to adapt your ways by force to a strange new presence. It allows you to live and work as usual, as before, but with romance in the breathable air. It seemed so to me of old, it seems so again; and I think it must have been from the Cornishes at Eton that I first received the spell of an art that isn't for grand days and occasions, much less for a surprise or a caprice, but for an existence. Well, their drawing-room was a delightful place; a great piece of old green tapestry, full of dim figures and dark branches, covered the wall at one end, opposite the high windows.

So here they lived, the Vice-Provost and his wife; and Eton owed them a debt that I shall enjoy declaring, though I am not the first to do so. It can't be named in

a few words. It was a matter of many exquisite details, lightly compacted together in a fashion that was only theirs. But exquisite, do I say? I should say nothing that suggests a want of broadest freedom; for though the effect that they made was very choice and particular, yet there played through it all such a sharp tonic intelligence that their effect was never too delicate for pungency. Indeed there was a keen salt in the criticism here turned upon things in general that made of it, I am sure, the wholesomest infusion of reality to be recognised at Eton. The Cornishes gave us this, and perhaps more of it than we all of us knew; for the tenuity of the loudest sound emitted by the Vice-Provost was misleading, you mightn't think it a tone to drive reality home; and as for his wife, I shall do my best in a moment to evoke the likeness of an exceedingly remarkable woman, and at least it will then be clear that she baffled the categories familiar to plain men. Anyhow they created a life that was open to the winds of thought; and a spirit of discrimination, always awake and watchful, imperturbably self-possessed, reigned in this retreat and quickened the air of the school-world. The Vice-Provost and his wife appeared to live at Eton as though it were a pleasant place like any other; they were no more bound to it than that, for on them, and almost on them alone at Eton, the school-world left no trace. They evaded its constraining or protecting influences, he softly, she brilliantly, though their years had been devoted to the school from their youth. It was without doubt a singular case.

Mrs. Cornish regarded Eton, I should say, with indulgence, with romantic affection, and with scorn; of all three I seem to hear the notes in her vibrant voice when she speaks of the place. There could be no question of her scorn, when she was moved to impatience; with head inclined, with eyes half-closed, she flashed out her edged phrase – her phrase that was summary and serviceable, of bold style, always neat and apt for a stroke. She used words with concentration, rejecting the superfluous and charging the needful with great intensity; she delivered her judgment suddenly, unexpectedly, as it were from out of a cloud, with a pounce that pinned it to the mark; and there she left it, she drew back – she never descended to explain. She was very lofty in her dealing with a platitude; she might glance at it from under her drooped eyelids, but she ignored it; and she rose with grand emphasis of tone to a nobler level of criticism and speculation. I suppose that at Eton the national custom of allowing conversation to run where it will, down the easiest slope, wasn't unknown; at any rate we felt the change when Mrs. Cornish commanded the talk, and we found her assuming that obvious things, the things we all know already, won't be suffered to occupy us. This was a fresh view of intercourse; and it took us aback, or we thought it did, with our national terror of fatigue in talk; but Mrs. Cornish didn't notice or consider our misgiving, she wouldn't be detained by it. She pursued her thought with ironic humour; and if it were a day

when her impatience had been stirred by the grovelling tameness or the insolent barbarism of our Eton, the most reverend heads might feel the fall of her lash. She was royally scornful, but not with solemnity; she didn't weakly qualify the sentence that she pronounced, but the ripple of her laughter would ring out as she drew back to survey it.

Or again – for the chances were always incalculable – it might be a day of quite another sort: perhaps a day of an amused tenderness, when she gazed from a far-away serenity of meditation, and her fancy wandered and broke out with a cooing charm of true poetry. She looked at familiar things as though they were new and rare; they became so as she spoke of them, and you saw the places or the people that you knew so well, and there was a light on them of interesting strangeness. She was never at the mercy of a habit; and her eccentricity might be disconcerting, but it was always significant – I mean that the queer novel thing she said was always straight from her thought, its instant and direct reflection. Cryptic, confounding as her remark could be, it had a pensive tone; it was contemplative, never a shaft at random, though it took you unfailingly by surprise. It was clearly beneath her to expatiate, to amplify the rich suggestive hint that she gave you from her rumination; and like her husband – yet so unlike him in the decorate texture of her style – she was content to let her challenge lie where it fell if you couldn't take it up. And if you couldn't, then you saw her lapse away into

composed oblivion, while the gaze of her eyes, that seemed to be always in a manner veiled, went roving upon the scene before her. Indeed when I think of her talk it doesn't appear to have needed another talker at any time; her comment on the scene or the matter in hand was a signal thrown out at remarkable points as she made her exploration. The line that she followed was hidden, and there was no telling where she would suddenly emerge, nor with what expression; like the ghost of the king, she worked in the earth so fast. You can imagine how she hustled a company whose steps from point to point were obvious and audible, one by one. When their slow tread became intolerable, then it may be that she would spring her surprise with satisfaction; I can even see a sidelong glance of hers in which there is a gleam of mirth and triumph, strictly for herself. But then again she was bland and stately, to all appearance quite unaware of any difference between herself and the company in intellectual pace.

I like to remember that with all this she wasn't alarming to a shy youth; we assumed that she was, with the ready-made judgment of young people, but it was an illusion. In fact her manner to youth was immensely flattering, for she never seemed to observe that one was young; it was a compliment such as one doesn't forget. The boy from the school, invited to the Cloisters by a charming and singular note from Mrs. Cornish – she couldn't write six words, asking you to dinner, as though there were any accepted style for such a communication

– was received like a real guest, like anybody else: a distinction that is clear to you, no doubt, if you recall the careful accent of the geniality with which you were so often hailed in old days and put at your ease. Geniality is all very well – very pleasant in its hour; but Mrs. Cornish's way is far more memorable, a much deeper source of encouragement to the age of self-consciousness. From the moment when her drawing-room door closed behind you, behold the blessed drop and lull of the old preoccupation, the eternal sense that you aren't your own mere self, but a member of a class and a troop, marked by your youth. Why is that ascription so troublesome? Because it raises an expectation in those you meet, and they come forward to greet you with a mind that isn't open; and it is your part to remember the right marks, the approved signs of your state of youth – to forget your sole self (*rien que ça!*) and behave with ease in the typical and generalised manner they expect. Oh the complication! But Mrs. Cornish, you would say, had never heard or dreamed of such a needless confusion of rational converse. The air was summarily cleared of all that nonsense, and nothing seemed to be expected of you but human reason; and this is a stimulating demand, not a disconcerting – for reason is real, not like the conventional labels of troops and classes. And so the end of it was that with Mrs. Cornish you did forget your poor self in an interesting talk; and you could look back on it afterwards with content, most justifiably, because for once it had been

allowed you to be really natural, not conventionally. (I am not denying that you may have talked like a prig; but what of that? It was natural.) See then: Mrs. Cornish, who might carelessly have been regarded as over-elaborate, with too much art in her style – it was she who cleared the air and simplified life, being genuine.

The long pressure of convention upon young people – I suppose indeed that we readily forget the malease it caused us of old, when it was still our turn to feel it. There was plenty of convention of our own making, to be sure, in many ways; we tied ourselves up in a code of rules that were rigid and minute, a network of ritual over all our days. But this was protective; it was created for the purpose proper to such things – which is to make room for freedom within; and it served its purpose, securing us against interference in many small affairs. It is pleasant to reflect that sooner than walk on the other side of the street or wear the other sort of coat I would have submitted to bodily pain – pleasant, because on this side of the street, in this coat, I knew I was safe from remark, my soul was so far my own. That is reasonable. But the tyranny that forces its hands into your soul, at least into your mind, this too we knew, and the responsibility for it wasn't ours. The majority of our kind elders, they were responsible; for they did so like and approve of us when we were dear good boys, and their liking and approving were so agreeable – how could we resist the relentless pressure of their wish, or

refuse to pretend to be dear good boys? Long and hard I pretended for my part, perhaps with small success; nor did I convince myself, save in some rare moment of complacency; but still I tried, plying my inward monitor with the fevered question – what am I expected to seem to be, to seem to think, to seem to do? And then would come the revulsion, and the fun of startling and shocking the expectation that one divined; but I never had the nerve for much of that. It isn't fanciful, what I say; I find it grim to recall the number and extent of the pretences, intellectual and moral, that were bound upon a not particularly dear or good young life. I quite long to hear a high wind of honesty and reality blow through that confinement; and I really can't admit that it was the fault of the young life in question if the windows were shut; moreover the high wind, if it had blown, would soon have burst them open. No – no: it never blew; and our pretences may have been unsuccessful after all, may have deceived nobody, but it was clear that we mightn't relax the strain of trying and trying to deceive. However, here was one place where at least on the intellectual side there was open air – in the Cloisters, at the Cornishes.

IX

IT was at the Cornishes too that I first met famous men, the hero as poet; the room of the pomegranates was the scene, and there for the first time in my life I saw a poet, and he spoke to me. But ought I to call it the first time, I stop myself to ask, seeing that all my Eton years were spent from the beginning under the roof of one who was a poet indeed, and a hero, if I am to use the words that match my memory of him in those days, nor in those days only? That one was my tutor, and before this record is closed I shall have tried to say something, I can never say all, concerning his greatness, how it grew and spread in the mind of a young disciple, till the best part of life seemed to consist of that association, that daily freedom of converse with Arthur Benson. He to be sure came first, and first he remained for many a day, in the supremacy of the interest that he lent to all my discovery of the poetic world; nobody else could be famous enough to rival the authority of my tutor's word, the lightest that he dropped. That was certain, the power of his word was absolute; but it had risen on me imperceptibly, like the day, and by now it was a fact in the order of natural things; so that he himself was never a man and a poet whom I met for the first time – I

never saw him in that light, detached in distinction against the common scene. When, therefore, I was bidden to the Cloisters to make the acquaintance of a hero, it was an event with which I had nothing to compare; and the glow of the sensation is renewed to me in the writing of this line – with the sound of his voice, as a boy is ceremonially introduced to him by our gracious hostess.

The circle of the Cornishes was somewhat peculiar at Eton, like so much else that was theirs: peculiar in this, that it constantly included strangers of mark, visitors from the world without – not merely 'parents,' who of course were a well-known sight, all over Eton, but guests and friends who came as friends, to visit the Cornishes. To their corner of the Cloisters came life that was such as it is elsewhere, not exclusively of the Eton tone and temper: life to which Eton was an amusement and an interest, no doubt, but not a tradition of faith: life which has its own work in other regions, where the school and the playing-fields are not the background of the scene. You may think it absurd, but one was always aware of the difference. 'Parents' we knew, and 'old Etonians': these brought with them a train of thought and talk that had a familiar colour; but here was another complexion of things, new orders of value, and I declare that even a rather formless boy was capable of appreciating the refreshment. There were definite kinds of relief in it; here, for example, you aren't summoned to join the old chorus of the glory of

games – to do so, or to feel wrong and inglorious if you can't; these people didn't care, weren't even conscious of that everlasting dilemma of anxious youth. That in itself wasn't a trifle. And then imagination expanded, and one had a vision of the freedom in which it is possible to live and move in a world of maturity, where people aren't afraid of the fatigue of ideas; for under that sky it is held that ideas are good for a man or a boy, so long as he searches and worries them with a will. I call them ideas, for a general name; but it wasn't so much the mental alacrity that attached me, for I was an easy-going thinker; it was the particular cast of the mind of the Cornishes' circle, which was literary. The love of books, whole-hearted, unqualified, unashamed – here it reigned; and it had my homage, once for all, without reserve.

The hero whose hand I shook was a poet, as I say; long and lean and loose, with his indolent grandeur, his broken ejaculation, his impatient hair, he was a poet of whom I could indeed believe that he

> 'doth in Heaven rejoice
> His most enchanted ear.'

(It didn't even bring him to earth to know that he was in fact an old Etonian; he raised the state to poetry.) And in process of time there were others – men of fame, men of books, who stopped and spoke to me; I saw them plain. And not only this, moreover: for what was even

more and greater was the sense that the Cornishes themselves were the transmitters of a brilliant legend; so that you reached, through them, back to the broad illustrious day that by this time was indeed a memory, but of no far past – back to the spacious day that had ceased of late upon the midnight when Tennyson died. Mrs. Cornish, I think, had known Tennyson; by affinities of her own she belonged to the company of the illuminate, and when she spoke of the mighty dead she saw them in remembrance – she, here in this very room, sitting by your side, could see them as in life. To me, absorbing her words, it was all but as though I could catch her memory and share her sight, so thin grew the veil that divided me from the vanished day. Tennyson was the sun upon that horizon, Tennyson the august, the hieratic; the majesty that still hung about his name was immense. And then there were other lights, other centres of irradiation that yet more irresistibly drew me; for the besetting need of youth isn't majesty to adore, it is romance to identify with itself; and for this one turns to the vision of singular colour, of fantasy, of moving and mysterious delight, not to the clear straight blaze of the sun. Even while I sat among the pomegranates Morris himself had departed, Burne-Jones had followed him; and their names had carried us back to the very fount, so it seemed, of the beauty that is strangeness – to Rossetti in the shadow of distance. Heroes, heroes living and dead, they had their hour and their power in that day, if ever anywhere at all.

This I say of myself, but it isn't what I should say of Mrs. Cornish. She was never really a worshipper, even in the most inspired of her flights of appreciation. She mused upon the images of memory, the greatest and the loveliest, with rapt fixity; she seemed to travel away in a dream, to be lost in a transcendental communion; but she was deliberate, she was even magisterial in her dream, not submissive. She didn't subside before the objects of her admiration; she sat erect and faced them, and they weren't spared if on their side they betrayed infirmity. There were seasons when nothing was bold and brisk and vigorous enough for Mrs. Cornish, and she rounded fiercely on the languors and raptures that entranced a sentimental lover; there was a sudden bite and hiss in her voice as she swept upon our tender enthusiasms like a flail. But again you never knew, for at times she did appear to abdicate all her independence, adopting and cherishing some favourite whom she read or recalled, to whom she was drawn in fascination; yet in such a case she had ever her own reason, odd and passionate, for her choice of devotion, and she worshipped so positively, so imperiously, that nobody would lightly claim her as a disciple. Not of her stuff is a docile votary made. I mustn't and I daren't speak of a more serious affair – her allegiance of later years to her Church, which was that of Rome; and yet it is unreal to talk of her without a word of it, for the least of her friends could know that life for her was before all else the vessel of her faith. I am sure of one thing at any rate, that she never held

an opinion tamely or a belief faintly, were it in a vast matter or a small, so deep and sharp was the originality of the stamp of her thought. She must have been a memorable woman wherever her lot had been cast; in a school – for remember that a school, with its need to satisfy so many claims, can never escape the drag of opinions that are safe, beliefs that are blameless, the rule of the average – in a place like Eton the part of Mrs. Cornish was uniquely brilliant. Did all Eton recognise that? I don't think so; and it must be admitted that her style wasn't formed to convince the first comer of her hold on firm fact, where illusion masks it. But a figure and character of renown at Eton, this she was for all of us who knew her, and well she might be; the school in that day is not to be thought of by any of us without the colour and stroke of her remarkable presence.

Meanwhile the Vice-Provost – where was he? Among the assembly that gathered about the poet, while Mrs. Cornish directed it with authority, the Vice-Provost was sitting or ranging loosely in the offing, with no air of responsibility; and the light brush of his words would pass you, close at hand, before you perceived that it was to you he spoke – if indeed it was to you after all, for his eyes were elsewhere as usual; and anyhow you hadn't caught the words, and it seemed coarse to ask him to repeat them. And so his comment on the scene has been missed once more; and it is greatly to be regretted, for the small sound of it, a quick short phrase

on a single note, slipped out like a dart that would penetrate where it struck, piercing the sense of the scene. It is sad to reflect how much of the Vice-Provost's wit and wisdom, so cool and so pointed, must have been lost on the air; so much as you did with luck intercept was alive with amusement and irony, playful and wayful criticism. He had no likeness to a schoolmaster, no hint of an instructor or expounder, less than none of an admonisher; he observed, and having observed he dropped his comment, and that was all. He too then, like his wife in her different way, how singular he appeared in a school; for a school is a place where much is more likely to be said than a little, where two words will do the work of one, where emphasis will usurp the function of nicety; it must be so in a school, no doubt, where the patient instructor has had to grow used to hammering, since his light touches leave no mark. The Vice-Provost, however, had passed through long years of active work in the school without acquiring the least habit of insistence. He had no care for his effect; he was a detached philosopher, enjoying the fruits of observation within the distinguished chamber of his mind: where he lived, not always in serenity, for sometimes he seemed to be anxious and undecided, as though there were things that he ought to be attending to if he could remember what they were – but where he lived, at any rate, with no call to force his wisdom on the world. I speak of his appearance to an onlooker; and at the same time it would be no surprise to learn that be-

neath that reticence high ambitions had been harboured, perhaps painfully disappointed. If he felt that life has small reason to be proud of its incompetent and make-shift ways, he certainly wasn't one to flatter it with words.

He wouldn't flatter it, but he did it the most discriminating justice. Nobody at Eton took so clear and composed a view of the world, nobody was so awake to its movement. I suppose it was mainly his wife who was responsible for the fresh flow of novelty and modernity through their corner of the Cloisters; but it was he also who surveyed it, since it came, with flexible interest, and he in particular who judged its looks and its works with quiet lucidity. The Cornishes were always modern; even by youth, excitedly hailing the newest star of dawn, they were seen to be fully aware of the changes of the sky. We were then, you don't forget, in the nineties of the last century; and I have no need to name the shining ones that in those years were twinkling in the forehead of the morning. (No need, because those years of the day before yesterday have now the state of history, are now matter for antiquarian research; and in passing I note an odd result of the quickened step of the generations. The idols of youth no longer have time to suffer eclipse; for to the youth of the day after to-morrow they appear so remote as already to be engagingly rococo, significant of bygone times and manners; and thus their altars are hardly cold before the cult is studied as a curiosity of the past. A child, to change my

figure, has no sooner broken his toy than the baby of the family begins to treasure the fragments as a memento of his brother's innocence. A quaint nursery!) Well then, I needn't be particular in recalling the latest wonders of our morning, their works that were not blameless, their looks that were not of blue; but what I do dwell on is the manner in which the Cornishes didn't appear to resent their arising. They seemed to hold it natural, the earth's audacious habit of rolling over and changing its heaven; and they spoke of it in the tone that is perfect, I must think, for those who have been young in an earlier dawn, and now are asked to find it bliss to be alive in this the latest. 'Bliss? – no, not that,' the Vice-Provost seemed to say; but he implied that it was interesting, and he desired to watch it, to hear whatever the new world's genius may have to say for itself. Very cool he looked as he listened – cool, but not chilling. Elsewhere our strange gaudy books and ideas might be treated with resentful mistrust, as by the elders of our company, or with rapture half-conscious of its vagueness, as by ourselves. And here was the Vice-Provost, neither vague in his judgment nor hostile in his posture: another fresh experience it was, and a pleasant shock.

It begins to be evident, I hope, the debt of Eton to the Cornishes. Theirs was the most liberal, the humanest culture of which we here had knowledge: culture that was kept straight and fine by him, adventurous by her, open-eyed by both of them. Theirs was the touch of worldly civilisation – not the pretence of it,

the true thing – for which there is so many a reason to be thankful in a school. You don't find it too often in a school, I dare say, the true and not the imitated thing in this order; and I don't see how without it the air of a school will keep its freshness. If you follow the Vice-Provost into the College Library, where he is pleased to take you – the Library is reached from the Gallery, and the Vice-Provost is Librarian – and there pursue him as he slips from shelf to shelf, from table to cabinet, handing you a book and passing on to a drawing, leaving you with drawing and book while he hunts for the other object of rarity that he can't lay his hand on for the moment; if you observe his slight figure, his bowed shoulders, his milk-white locks, while he veers to and fro among the treasures of the high book-lined chamber and heaps them together before you: well may you think him the true type of a scholar and a recluse, grown frail and venerable in this haunt of peace that is fragrant of old books and old learning – from which he might never have looked out to consider the ways of a restless age, or only to give them a glance through the protecting glass that muffles their noise, and so back to his books again in the grey north light of his chamber. So he seems; but you can't listen for long to the tone of his talk – more easily caught in the quiet of the Library than in the stirring saloon – without perception of the reach and the penetration of this watchful mind. The sane sense of value, proportion, experience, is here maintained in the school-world that is always and

inevitably tending to falsify it – with its hammer of emphasis on one side, the safe side, the seemly and unblamed. The Vice-Provost wasn't rashness, but he was intelligence undeluded. And if you feel that more colour and more force are desirable for a civilised culture, look and listen when his wife enters the Library, ushering her most distinguished guest. She strikes the grey air with her flashing phrase; nothing dim and nothing languid remains where she has passed.

X

I AM discovering after all that a good deal survived at Eton from the day of the reign of taste, as I have called it – the day when a young Etonian was sent forth to assume his place in the world with a classic discipline of mind. Eton, having by the century's last years changed her purpose, having shifted the weight of her attention from the young creature's mind to his character – because, as I suppose, he now in the main had to conquer his place in the world before he could assume it, and for this he needed all the force of the whole of himself, and a power of tasteful judgment was not enough: Eton, I say, desiring rather to make good citizens of all her children than to decorate a few with the civilised arts, has trusted the flower of culture to bloom unofficially, under certain kindly roofs, and has not trusted in vain. There were other corners of Eton, beside this of the Cloisters that I have described, where the plant flowered and scattered its seed – we shall soon see. But let us first remember that Eton has never had to look only to a few people under a few roofs for the nourishment of the imagination of youth. The fortune of Eton is such that the place itself is all a paragon of noble style; and I don't speak only of the beauty of the

ancient buildings, but also of the manner in which nature and history work together in the watery valley to dignify the life of the school. We have had a rather narrow escape in this respect; for the tide of meanness and ugliness that pours out from the flats of Middlesex has dreadfully approached us in one quarter, and we are saved from it only by the breadth of the green and sacred playing-fields. A narrow escape: but the margin is sufficient, seeing how grandly we are sustained from other sides; and I measure the effect of this support by trying to imagine what becomes of Eton without our two great neighbours, the River and the Castle.

The River throws its arm about Eton with an ample swing. The Thames is a very lordly water, in these its middle reaches. Shy and shadowy in its younger course, by the time when it comes within hail of the great pile of the Castle it has long lost its diffidence; it broadens and flashes in the noonday, sliding placidly, but with pride. The cool-haired nymphs of the Isis are left behind, in the devious retirement of the upper stream; or if any attend the progress of the grander flood, they lurk apart among the willows and reeds of the back-waters, where the swan and her cygnets find their haven. Through the middle of the sunlight and the bounty of the broad royal valley flows the Thames; and only the level streak of the kingfisher's flight is brilliant enough to be worn as an adornment by the River, where the blaze of the day quenches all lesser glories. This is beauty noble and large-handed, beauty with authority

and profusion, and Eton is half-encircled in it. Consider what it gives us, that in our picture of the background of the school, and of the years that we spent in it, meanness of style isn't seen or thought of; it is swept over by our countless familiarity with the renown of this green stretch of the hollow land, the heart of England. Great trees of broad shade, great spaces of golden light, and the splendid River winding about us and washing our coast – there is no association with Eton that isn't mingled with these; and whether we are aware of it or unaware, we never think of Eton but we think in some way of her sumptuous setting – taken for granted, I dare say, because it has never so much as occurred to us that Eton could be Eton without that beauty. How much and how often, I wonder, did we know it with knowledge in those days? More than a little, perhaps, and more often than was evident; but the question is idle, for however it has happened beauty exists for us in the name of Eton.

And more than this, our place in the valley of the Thames has given us the sight of history – history that has flowed down our valley as steadily as the River itself, through the centuries of the life of the school. I think of summer mornings on Fellow's Eyot, the sparkling of the weir-stream, the softness of mist and shade beneath the huge rampart of the Castle on its height: and then the noble poise and outline of the vast mass itself, grey and dim in the morning freshness – that precipitous range of the Castle, lifted against the

sky, which dominates all our Eton days; and with this there comes the sense of being face to face with the display of the fortunes of England, and our own domain, looped in the embrace of the Thames, is in contact with fate on a grand scale, with history that goes rolling past our border, down the broadening valley to London and the sea. I have always liked to reflect that the first Eton boys, if they were taught the geography of the realm, might learn that the rule of their saintly Founder still reached to the duchy of Eleanor his ancestress – in fact it did, not in name only, for a few years of the school's career; so that Eton, looking up at the Castle, is linked with days when there were knights and merchants of England in Guyenne, and the tale of the middle ages had not yet been told to its very end. English disaster, English glory, from those days onward we have heard the echo of both in our very ears. A tiny college of poor priests and scholars or a great and secular school, Eton in obscurity has been illuminated and in fame has been overshadowed by our magnificent neighbour; and in both kinds it has been a saving experience, to be sure. It means, no doubt, that we think of Eton not too lightly, not too solemnly, since Eton holds a high place of honour in the land, and yet the school isn't all the world that we see from our windows every day; and so we can't but be proud of our position, though we know it isn't conspicuous up and down the land, like the Round Tower. Is that a true account of our reasoning? At any rate we hope so – we hope that we argue on such lines.

And the Castle was anyhow a pleasing adjunct to the school, a convenient field of curious exploration. We weren't oppressed by its majesty when we climbed the Hundred Steps to investigate the small town that huddles at the top, within the wall of the precinct – a tangle of houses and cloisters and dark passages, out of which you emerge into the spacious bleakness and blankness that is the Castle's majesty when at last you reach it. Glorious as it is in every distant prospect, the Castle in a near view turns the most ardent imagination stone-cold; the great bare yard, the frigid complacency, the expensive poverty of all its style – what an exhibition it is of pretence, of history smothered in make-believe! – do but look at this solemn show of stage-feudalism, with its towers and castellations that don't recall a saint or a hero of England, only the Gentleman of Europe. Well, I can't say we were vexed by these reflections; we loitered on the Terrace, we made the due round of the State Apartments; but still it is like a return to reality when we drop down the slope, past the ditch of the Round Tower, to St. George's – where in the dim choir, beneath the stately array of the banners of the Knights, the past becomes truth again, romance again, and you can live in it poetically and truly. And at the same time I must admit that even in St. George's it wasn't only England of Lancaster and York that I evoked; for into the medieval glory and gloom the age of complacency pushes even here, and the flighty eye is caught by monuments of the taste of

Hanover. They aren't gloomy, though they are lacrymose, and their glory is of the drawing-room, not of the historic sanctuary; but the imagination of youth has a powerful digestion and can mix its fare without a qualm. We robustly took the sights of the Chapel in their order, the noble and the base; and when we passed out through the great gate into the street of Windsor we had ransacked the Castle with all the thoroughness, and it is much, that is allowed to the simple tourist. I may not often have done the same in later years; but the notion of the Castle as a familiar possession, with nothing estranging in its lofty name, will never be lost.

And so we proceed to the Long Walk; but the Long Walk, and the Copper Horse at the end of it, and the Park beyond the Horse, are matter for another day, probably for Sunday afternoon – the one bit of the week when we are encouraged and even ordered to roam in the country. On other days it is presumed and as far as possible secured that we can't tear ourselves away from our happy sports in common; and then it needs a good deal of ingenuity to evade the rigour of the game – I don't say it can't be done. By artfulness, by some judicious deceit, above all by patient and unwearying obstinacy, you may extricate yourself from the tentacles of those 'compulsory games' that hang over you with such a menace, dropping to clutch you at any moment when you might be enjoying the freedom of the wildwood and the weather. It can be done, but at what an expense! – for my part I find myself so deeply

engaged in the effort to escape that I may waste my freedom when I have it; and the long summer afternoon, which by a tissue of chicanery I have won for my own, may lapse away between my hot little room and the deserted street; but in the empty street a half-holiday loafer is perilously exposed, and so it is best to sit indoors, reading the book that soon spreads away to the whole circle of one's horizon, while a hand mechanically reaches out from time to time to the paper bag of nourishment upon the table. Well, memory is not ill-pleased by that scene either; though I honestly say that I remember how I thought, as the day turned to gold, of the shimmering meadows, of bird-song in the woods, so easy to reach if it weren't for those tentacles – or rather if it weren't for people's opinion, a force which you can't openly defy single-handed, though you may cheat it for an hour now and then. Thus far I cheat it, lying low with my book (a big solid work, I assure you) and my paper bag; but to march out in the eyes of men, challenging their questions, and to wander away into the country as I longed to do (I was passionately a naturalist) – this was a stroke that I found, nor does it now surprise me, beyond my courage.

That is how it happens that in my memory the Great Park of Windsor is merely the place for a regulated walk with a friend, black-coated and top-hatted, on Sunday afternoon, not a world to discover at one's ease. What a waste of the depths and solitudes of the Park! – for they are endless, and they are made for the lover of

freedom and nature; the Park in its further recesses soon loses the look of a gentlemanly pleasure-ground and becomes a piece of old wild England, a chase of green glades and ferny hollows where the hunting-horns of ghosts and kings might sound at the drop of the light. The silence awaits them, a summer silence unbroken for hours and hours; if a woodpecker suddenly laughs from an oak it is an event. Into this old world you can pass, you can reach it almost at once, as soon as the portly Hanoverian on his horse is behind you; he sits at the end of the Long Walk, the farthest point that a respectable monarch will reach as he trots his daily round; the haunt of the demon huntsman is beyond his range. But alas it was almost beyond mine, on those top-hatted Sunday afternoons; and even if I escape there on a half-holiday in the week, braving opinion, my top-hat must go too, for my only way to the Park is by the street and Castle Hill, where you mustn't go rustically clad; and in my black coat I am not fit for the Norman chase, only for the constitutional old gentleman on his powerful horse. And so the real freedom of the Park is hardly mine in school-days, and I must be content with the Long Walk of formality – not so little, after all, for there are nearly three miles of it between its towering elms, from the Castle to the Horse; and if it isn't made for romance it has fully the length that is needed for one of those easily trailing talks, discussions, arguments – not arguments, I think, so much as relations in abounding detail – which are almost as good in

themselves as an exploration of new worlds. How we do talk! What I enjoy is to see a vista of hours in front of me, as long as the Long Walk, down which we shall proceed, I and the person with me, in miles of talk that are safe from the interruption of anybody else. Thus it is that the Park of those days is to me a plain field of talk, no haunted kingdom of oak and fern and solitude.

Or perhaps it is not a Sunday of summer; perhaps it is a late autumn afternoon, when the soft fog of the Thames valley, as quiet as a nun, clings to the hollows of the Park; and now the silence is broken by the braying of the red deer, an ominous note in the fading of the day. We loiter homeward, our faces towards the Castle; and we are presently in the street of Windsor, still loitering, when we become aware of another booming note in the distance and the twilight, the funereal toll of our chapel bell; and there is a full mile still to be covered, and the steep swing of the hill, under the Curfew Tower, is taken at a run. Down we plunge, over the bridge and along the interminable street of Eton; but there is time to spare. And well that there is, and that we may pull up for a moment under the dripping lime-trees before turning into school-yard; for here is that which I would never miss, a sight for which any one may take the risk of a pause. Trotting sedately yet swiftly out of the fog and the deepening twilight, here is an outrider – you know what he portends; and I wish I could collect in a phrase the interest, the curiosity, the emotion too, with which I pause and gaze.

The Queen used to pass through Eton on her afternoon drive not seldom, and it seems to be generally in mist and mirk that I see her; she defied the sky and the autumn nightfall – as why should she not, eternal and immutable as she was? I, standing there in the drizzle, could as well imagine the earth without the sky above it as England and Eton and the Castle, as things in general, without the Queen. Could anybody living remember a time when she wasn't there, splendidly secluded, presiding over things in general? I could hardly think so, nor even that except in history transmitted from another age she was ever otherwise than as we now beheld her, full of years and wisdom, watching over us all, in spite of her majesty, with a positively incredible benevolence. How she felt for us all, that marvellous old lady! – the depths of her heart were inexhaustible. I was naturally curious and interested to see her pass, but certainly I was also moved; she was the grandmother of us all.

Let it not be thought, then, that for us at the end of the century Queen Victoria was merely a legendary image, seated aloft on a monument – an ancient fact that had become with time as impersonal as nature. Not at all, she was our fond old lady: guiding the land, the nation, the world almost, with her venerable influence, but also sharing and living in our lives and fortunes, those of the simpler sort especially; and all without pomp or display, though with a dignity so massive; till the glitter of other courts, the brilliance of other

times, appeared meretricious and tawdry beside the homeliness that she loved. That was the great manner for a great queen: we thought so, she had made us think so, in those last years of her seclusion and her eternity. And accordingly, to return to that late dank evening, I felt a pleasing warmth at her approach; she belonged to us all, and none in the world beside ourselves had a queen and a grandmother to compare with her. The outrider led the way, and then the big old open carriage bowled into view, with its sides so curiously painted to imitate the seat of a cane-bottomed chair. There she was, sitting low, her head nodding forward under a black hat. It is strange to think, in the instant as she passes, that under that hat is all that we know and hear of and talk about as the Queen. It is all there: look well at it, look hard, and pull off your own black hat, though she doesn't see you in the gloom. And then she is gone, she disappears into the unseen where she dwells, whence she emerges for these occasional glimpses. I count a number of them, enough to make me feel that I lived on the friendliest terms with Queen Victoria.

XI

SUCH were our noble neighbours, at the right distance from us for a clear view – a view such as we naturally couldn't get of Eton itself. It was a long while before I began to create an idea of Eton and to find it beautiful, though with time I did so, with time that calmed the seethe of anxiety in which I lived at first. Later on it was pleasing knowledge to know that one belonged to Eton; but in early days I belonged to Eton as the straw to the wind that whirls it, and my prayer, which I well saw to be vain, was only that I might be dropped and left behind, while Eton roared on its way. I had no tenderness for Eton at that time, nor any notion of a willing surrender to the place; but a straw can't talk of resistance, and the whirl went on; and gradually, in a mind still stubbornly detached, there grew a familiarity with the look of Eton and a habit of its company – which wasn't grim after all, for many of its looks and phases were attaching in their oddity, their singularity; beautiful I couldn't call them, but one must admit that they were entertaining. These matters that I refer to are not, you understand, my personal affair; the life I lead in the house and in the school is still too full of agitating chances for a thoughtful view

of it. But the old figures of Eton, the old peculiarities that don't intimately affect me, these stand firm; and I find myself considering them, as time goes on, with an attention that becomes indulgent unawares. The remarkable old things, you can't watch them day by day, learn their foibles by heart, allude to them by nicknames of which the meaning is lost to memory, without a sort of kindness; they are institutions, very harmless on the whole, and I should miss them if they were swept away. I allude to some of the more ancient of the masters of my day at Eton.

It may be very little that I know of them; but that little, how well I know it! Occasionally I am, as we say, up to them: which means that I am placed in the divisions that they teach; I am up to them for mathematics, for French, for science and the like. (In my division proper, my classical division, I am, till I ascend high in the school, in the hands of some junior, of manners not so legendary; but I can't stay to explain why it is that I learn Latin from a young man, algebra from an old; it is entailed by the system, and it seems natural to me. Enough of that.) One by one I survey these bald or hoary heads, these whiskered faces, these beards that taper like a weed or bunch like wool; eyes I see that peer and twinkle, eyes that dart and snap with impatience; voices I hear that droop and mutter, that soar and pipe, that troll sonorous and round; each was always himself, true to his vein, faithful to his humour, while our generations came and went. The

best of the stories that I tell of them were told by our fathers before us; and nothing brings home to me that the school has had a past and a history as do these old men, I could name perhaps a dozen, who have sat there facing their divisions for so many a year, with their antique jests and retorts and expostulations. They indeed are the continuity of Eton; they abide, rocks in the flowing tide of youth around them, and they keep the place fixed and absolute, the place that without them would be nothing but a trackless passage of waves advancing and receding. True there are the old buildings, chapel and Upper School and the rest; there is the Founder in school-yard; and these, you might think, would give Eton an enduring face and form. So they do, later on, when I in my turn am borne away; then the brick and the stone of Eton appear to me as they are, founded upon centuries, as I salute them from my distance. But it isn't so in the beginning, in the early days,when school-yard is mixed up with all the ordinary business of the hour; in those conditions it is scarcely more historic than myself. It is the old men with their trailing legends, it is they who start me on the discovery that Eton is very old, as old as they, still older.

Of course, I knew that the school had its annals, no doubt a very honourable record, if you count it for honour that many famous names have been called at one time or another in school-yard; but to tell the truth I hardly knew or cared to know of these. How many celebrated statesmen has Eton nurtured, how many

viceroys, archbishops, soldiers of renown? As many as you please – I take them all for granted; but this I know, that of the men of old whom I was chiefly proud of there were few, there was hardly one, who ever set eyes on the Founder's statue. Neither the author of *Pickwick* nor the author of *Kidnapped* was educated at Eton; if either of their great names had once been cried from the chapel-steps I might begin to be interested in the heroes of our calendar. As it is I can't pretend to give them a thought; their distinction is official and worldly, no concern of mine. I don't forget that there was a poet or two among them – Gray, Shelley; but Shelley I think was still a cloud beyond clasping, and the prospect of Gray, as seen from Eton, was excessively pale and prim. Swinburne too – but it is not by his kinship with Eton, to say the least of it, that one is led to Swinburne. In other groves, by other streams, not in the playing-fields or by the Thames our poets lave their locks. And on the whole my sense of the past of Eton was kindled by none of the names that were held to shine so lustrous on our roll; I always found it tedious when any of our teachers and preachers tried to adorn a tale with one of the incorruptible prime ministers or the simple-minded lion-hearted generals. But I must say it wasn't often that they tried, for Eton hasn't any marked tradition of the cult of piety; the portraits of the bishops and the secretaries of state are hung in the cloister-gallery and in College Hall, their names are seldom heard.

Moreover there is another reason, a broader reason for my indifference, covering all the names that are hacked on the panels of Upper School; and it is that our predecessors, when they sat on our benches in their Eton days, were simply, were merely – like *me*, if I may put it so, like me and the other people in my division or my house. This doesn't say clearly what I mean; but I am here faced by that odd lacuna in our Eton speech, already in these pages I have been embarrassed by it, where the word should be found that would express what you are when you are neither child nor man. The word exists elsewhere, but we never breathe it; and somehow there has never been coined or adopted at Eton – save perhaps facetiously, as a passing whim or fashion – a prescriptive word to describe what we are in the mass, we who sit on the benches at the moment. We are supposed in the story-books to say 'the chaps' or 'the fellows' or something of the kind; but in fact we rather carefully avoid the jargon of the story-books, and we are left with a strange difficulty in naming our collective state. Anyhow the state of our distinguished predecessors, while they were at Eton, was *that*; and the romance of Eton, please make no mistake, doesn't tinge or transfigure the mere horde of top-hats and jackets and white ties that swarm across the street to absence or to chapel. For my part I regard them in the bunch (individually is another question) as interesting from no point of view whatever; I see them at too short a range for poetry. And if I have begun to

look sympathetically at the past of Eton, my fondness isn't in the least attracted by the sight that is possibly touching and appealing to *you* – the running stream of sparkling joy that (in Mr. Chadband's daring figure) has soared at Eton through several centuries of unaging youth. As soon as the charm of youth is a little further away from me I shall be ready to join you in your kindness. While it is still clattering all about me, battering on my door, invading me with its tactless freedom, I can only feel that in the mass its poetry has been overrated.

Very well, then: if the great Etonians of history don't help me to admire the age of Eton – because their glory after all wasn't earned there, and you can't honestly think, whatever they may say in moments of public emotion, that the school was the grand inspiration of their lives and deeds – it is to the men who have remained, who have grown to antiquity on the spot, that I shall look for the proof that Eton is an abiding city. Here, for instance, is the Bursar of my early time, the Reverend William Adolphus Carter: I knew him only as he passed with bowed shoulders and climbed, not without labour, to his stall in chapel – from which he would declaim (it was the only occasion of his addressing us) the curses on Ash Wednesday, not, as we thought, without relish. The sight and the sound of the Bursar were clearly immemorial; he opened a vista of backward reach to the days of Eton before anything was reformed there or any one regenerated – to the

days of the old clerical Fellows who had roosted in the Cloisters like a flock of jackdaws, now long ago vanished, leaving nothing behind them but a few droll anecdotes of their talk and bearing. Such was the Bursar. And among the masters there were not a few, as I have observed, who had taken the rank of monuments, I don't say by their real age, to me unknown, but by the Gothic richness of their marks and mouldings. Some were statelier, some were sprightlier, but all alike wore the weathering of Eton; and some were severer, some more easy-going, but the habit of each had been so long established that there could be no difficulty in adjusting oneself to its curves or angles. You are safe with a monument, you know where you are with him, and while he remains in his place this bit of the world stands still. Now the last vestige of it has rolled out of sight; and yet it is to be hoped that there are still Badgers, still Peckers and Hoppies, for those who need and who deserve them.

Badger Hale – I can't let that name escape me lightly, nor the sight of him that instantly slips to the front of memory as I say it. He was a jolly old gentleman indeed, with a rosy face framed in white whiskers; his eye rolled as he uttered his joke. Why Badger? He was the Reverend Edward Hale: our forefathers called him Badger, and so did we, but no one knew why. He was broad and benevolent and paternal; he lounged comfortably in his chair before his big desk, raised on its platform, and we sat in our rows beneath him,

writing in our note-books from his dictation; and behind him stood the blackboard, already covered with inscriptions before we began, with words and symbols of which the meaning was now to be revealed. Presently we arrive in our dictation at a strange word, and there is much fumbling on the floor of the platform to find the pointer or long wand – which I then see swaying over the surface of the blackboard, while Badger, wielding the wand, screws round and peers and searches; and at last he discovers and points to the word, written up there, which we must now copy into our note-books; so that each new word makes quite an affair and a stir in the process of the hour. It is science that Badger teaches us – they are scientific words; and by the end of the hour we may read in our note-books how the earth is shaped, why gunpowder explodes, why water boils. But our teaching is not only theoretic, for Badger will occasionally perform an experiment. With immense gusto he assembles the appliances on his desk, in full view; he adjusts the retort, the tube, the gas-jet. 'Now, boys, watch carefully' – and this is a breathless moment, full of suspense, while Badger draws back and frowns in silence. And then, behold – the spark has snapped, the carbon has ignited, the fumes are ejected: it has happened as he foretold, whatever it is; and now you should see the broad smile of satisfaction and triumph on the rosy face, as Badger throws back his head and beams round on us and takes our applause. He was as delighted, and we thought as surprised, as any of us.

In course of time we had graver teaching than his, in this matter of science, but nothing that lives in my memory like that gleeful and triumphant smile over the success of his experiment.

Shall we turn to Pecker Rouse? (Why Pecker? The answer is the same as before.) Here you see a very different figure. The countenance of Pecker was not genial, not rosy; it was dusky-hued, muffled in a moss-like growth of hair. He peeped furtively at the day as though he had too often caught it in the act of insulting him to trust it further. With short shuffling steps, his head uneasily turning from side to side, he threaded the crowd of us that were clustered about his school-room door; and when we followed him within, and the door was shut, a thick twilight seemed to descend upon our operations, a dimness in which the voice of Pecker, muttering instruction, sounded hardly more articulate than a low growl or grunt, as it might be of some shy animal in a wood by night. This was a mathematical hour; and while we bent over our note-books and worked out our equations Pecker moved up and down our rows, pausing and inspecting our efforts. For this purpose he didn't look over your shoulder, from behind; he stood in front of you, facing you, so that he saw the tangle of your equation upside down upon the page; and he not only was able to read it in that position, but he inserted his corrections and additions reversed to suit it – I can see his pencil jerkily forming figures and letters in this interesting looking-glass fashion. That appears

to be the chief algebraic exploit that he taught me – not one that I have found of frequent use, but it was amusing to practise it. The hour was peaceful, if monotonous. There was something irritable and protesting in Pecker's method of criticism; he seemed to suspect you of confusing your equations in order to mock him, and nobody could suppose that his temper was a sweet one. But the muffling twilight spread around him, reducing the spirit of the boldest, and I don't think we often dashed against his rule; his discipline was no louder than a hiss and a mutter, but there was a hint of a vicious note in it – he wasn't one of the kindly incompetents who asked for your heckling. Boys are not the noblest of beasts of prey; they harry the sheep, they don't disturb the sloth with his claws. Not on that word, however, shall I take my leave of Pecker. He wasn't one of Eton's showier or comelier institutions, but I couldn't think the place complete without him.

Or old Frank Tarver? – not that he was really so antique, but he looked like a patriarch. Here we find comeliness at any rate, for he was decidedly a handsome old gentleman, with his fresh complexion, his important nose, his snowy and abundant hair. He seemed to welcome us into school with a liberal grace; he was no usher, he was a man of the world, and he taught us an appropriate subject, or he made it appear so in his teaching. It was French – but by no means the French, so to speak, of a trip to Boulogne, still less of the platitudes of the phrase-books; it was the spacious days of

the Grand Tour, of the English gentleman rolling across the continent in his travelling-chariot, that he recalled. Not that he was stiff or formal: he bantered, he rallied us with charm and good humour, and he was always ready to descend to us with a fine old Eton joke. But he imparted a manner of stateliness to our inroads upon the books appointed us to read, *Colomba* was one, another was *Quatre-vingt-treize*; and though we never got far into the books, which seemed to be all explanatory notes and no story, their very names bring back to me the large and leisurely ease of old Tarver's intonation. His pictorial head stands out against the dark woodwork of the wall behind him, and his arm in the folds of his gown sweeps up with a dignified gesture, and he rounds out a phrase magisterially; and if I remember all this so clearly, who shall say that he taught us no French? As for learning from him to utter any French of my own, the idea never brushed my mind. That which I acquired in those hours with old Tarver had no vulgar usefulness, but possibly it was something long since grown rarer than the phrases that you require at Boulogne. Whenever I now land there myself, my pleasure is to mount the steps of a capacious carriage, with great pockets in its lining full of provisions and books, and to rattle away over the cobble-stones with an old sherry-merchant of Denmark Hill and his slim young son for my companions; and as often as I do this my thoughts return to the handsome old gentleman at Eton who first brought me acquainted (I am not saying I was

aware of it at the time) with a tradition of Gallic culture as British and as Victorian as the view from Denmark Hill. And so after all these years an imagination is working on a grain of material that was given it by old Tarver. I wish I could thank him.

Well, our venerable friends taught us little, it must be allowed, in the endless hours of our attendance on their teaching; and yet again I discern how they wrought in their various fashions to enlarge a young creature's notion of the world. Wherever you see age and character, the tracks of time, the patina of experience, there is a store from which a young idea can help itself – in which it can strike root, finding the depth that it can't find in a thin young existence. May it be for the consolation of our old friends, if they need it, that when we most ruthlessly study their oddities we are most fruitfully learning – for it is fruitful, that familiarity with time's handiwork and expression. Outward and round about you, on your own level and in your own time, there can't be many visions of a distant prospect – even though you do from Eton see the Castle and the Queen, as I haven't forgotten. But I dare say we easily overlook this other extension of youth's experience, this plunge that it may take into life foreshortened, as I may call it, in seasonable age. We strike obliquely into the world of the past, through these old friends; and we are not to think lightly of the privilege, merely because their world wasn't vast or marvellous. The past is the past – always marvellous, for it is immortal, and always vast

enough at any rate to give you more and more beyond your reach. What, may I ask, is culture? Is it not first of all to take a mind and let it loose into the past? Discrimination and selection will follow in their course; let us enter the past, to begin with, wherever and however we may – and if through the sight of Badger and Pecker and the rest of them, very well. 'Let me embrace thee, good old chronicle' – you remember how Shakespeare's Hector addresses the aged Nestor in the play – 'that hast so long walk'd hand in hand with time.' I couldn't put it better than Shakespeare, what I mean; and I salute the good old chronicles of Eton.

XII

I FEEL that my world must have been greatly enlarged by the sight of Edward Austen Leigh, our Lower Master; for his is a memory that broadens into richness and ripeness and humour wherever his name is spoken. I knew him only at a distance, I never was in official contact with him; but I watched him with avidity from my place in Lower Chapel, in my earliest Eton days, and indeed he was worth watching, worth hearing even more. I see his bald head and his ruddy face, his roving eye, the shining solemnity of his puffed cheeks – he looked always like a prosperous country gentleman on a Sunday morning; and in his inquisitive glances as he bends over his book, peering to right and left, edging aside for a clearer view among our ranks, I see an irresistibly comical flash of spirit – artful and complacent, roguish and triumphant, as though he had surprised us misbehaving again, and was so proud at having caught us at our tricks so neatly that this alone was satisfaction enough. I watched him like a play. He bowed himself decorously in his stall, he buried his face, but we never doubted that he peeped through his fingers, savouring his own cunning while he did so. We enjoyed the play, but it doesn't mean that we

thought lightly of his power; for everybody knew that the Lower Master was no man to be trifled with, and some could tell you that he wielded the birch with high skill – in much more business-like style than the Head, with whom he shared the prerogative. I relate the common report in this matter. But I do clearly feel, as he advances up the length of the aisle of Lower Chapel – with his red cheeks blown out, his silk gown bellying behind him, his head ducked forward and sideways in his purposeful march – I am clearly aware that he is one of the great, one of the potent in his course, no show for mere amusement.

He worked his way up the aisle and took his stand at the lectern; it was his pleasure to read the daily lesson. I would give much to hear him now, with the appreciation I could now bring to his reading; and yet I may well hear him, at this moment as I write, and I know the lesson I shall select. It is the story of the man that was born blind and was restored to sight. The Lower Master sets about it with a will; he reads how the man was healed, and how his joy in the gift of sight was the beginning of such embarrassment for him, such interrogation and argument, that it is no wonder if his patience is strained; and the voice of the reader grows warm, grows positively indignant as the molestation of the man is described – of the man whose only fault is his joyful gratitude for the marvel of his healing. Who can help sympathising with him in his growing irritation? The Pharisees give him no peace, they beset him with their

questions; and now the reader embraces the cause of the man and falls with zeal into the dispute – a drama of vexation, as the man is goaded into protest. What is all this talk of the Pharisees about the sinfulness of the healer? 'One thing *I* know,' cries the man, almost out of patience, 'that whereas I was blind, now I see' – and while his voice rises you can hear how he warms to the argument, forcing his persecutors to be reasonable. In vain – they hammer on; and at last the unfortunate man breaks out in a very wail of exasperation. 'Why herein is a *maaarvellous* thing' – they have tried him too far, he can't contain himself – 'that ye know not from whence he is' – the ineptitude of it! Well then, for the last time – 'and yet he hath opened mine eyes.' There! – *can't* you be sensible and let me alone? And by this time I am roused by the reader of the lesson to such indignant participation in the scene that whenever I recall it again I shall think of the voice, arguing, exclaiming, expostulating, of the Lower Master.

I haven't the pretension of portraying this man – his was a larger and richer character than I had the means to understand in those days. But we prized the Lower Master for what we knew of him, and we nourished the legend of his remarks and retorts, so pungently seasoned, so blandly served. He was an Eton figure of the very centre, of the marrow of Eton life. Nobody in the whole place offered a higher value for mimicry, if that was your talent; there was a flexible cry in his voice,

a roll in his phrase, an intensity of relish in his strangely fluted vowels, which the talented amongst us were for ever exercised in reproducing. Tales reached us of many a private gathering of Eton masters – they are very hospitable among themselves, they entertain each other at small dinner-parties, Attic feasts of which you catch the rumour and the savour from your tutor's sanctum as you pass to supper – tales of the table where they sit at ease, exchanging (as Mrs. Wilfer happily puts it) the most exquisite sallies; and among them it is the Lower Master who suavely crowns the discussion with the most ornate, most farcically perverse of judgments – delivered in the form of an all-annihilating contradiction, by which he evades the indignity of agreeing with anybody present. This company on the whole was not ancient; some of the old heads, the more genial, were seen in it as a matter of course, but it was mainly made up of the middle and younger staff; and here you remark, besides hospitality, another pronounced feature of our masters' social habits. It is their freedom of repartee, their liberal rudeness among themselves; if you came from other worlds to enter this circle you would be struck, I assure you, by the jollity that isn't uneasily careful of the angles and sore points of its neighbour at the dinner-table. And herein the Lower Master, one of the balder heads of the fraternity, more than holds his own. His roundly phrased opinion, let loose among a dozen others, contrives to fly clean in the face of each of the dozen at once; the feat might seem

impossible if it weren't attested by a score of tales of the Lower Master.

A small society of men who perforce are seeing a great deal of each other, who are all engaged on a task that at the best must rack the nerves, a business on which they can never close the door – these are the men who are marked by two such gifts; and let us not be inattentive while they display them. They dined well, they dined sociably: commend them first for this, remembering the degree of your own inclination for organised cheer in the society of your colleagues, at the end of the dusty day. I think it remarkable, how our Eton masters didn't allow their convivial round to go flat, even while they could only look to themselves, bound to the round as they were, for any sparkle. That is good, we must agree. And then, what is extraordinary, it appears they were so sure of themselves that they weren't worried to protect themselves, to save the surface of their intercourse – how *am* I to express it? – by an anxious cult of civility when they met to talk. Don't smile, but consider: at such close quarters to be unafraid of jovial rudeness – it speaks, as we say, volumes. Do I make too much of it? I think not: for this sound of plain speech among our elders is one of Eton's notes; and you may take it for a sign that in a place so full of youth nobody now grows altogether aged. In days long ago a schoolmaster grew old before his time, for his task was to cure the young of youthfulness. But then came the change, the great change of which

we don't yet see the end; and wherever youth became a thing to be envied, not grudged to the young, there was age susceptible and tractable, open to youthful influence – young itself. A schoolmaster in a school, if he isn't triply steeled against the admonitions of newness and freshness all about him, how will he escape them, why should he wish to escape? He can't grow old; and in numberless ways you note how he catches vitality, how it is blown into him by the gale of it in which he passes his life. I presume to say that we have just found a small example of this inspiration – in the cheerful noise of a party of hard-worked men, whose day's work isn't finished even now, is never finished till they sleep.

It isn't only the younger of our masters, by any means, who are observable for their youth. It was seen in many of the hoary heads of my time, on figures who had grown into as much history as the Lower Master himself. Nay, in the chief of our state, in Warre the tremendous, haven't we seen the imperishable schoolboy at his greatest, not disguised by his robes of power? Warre was sanguine and zealous, where the Lower Master was more measured, more incisive; but perhaps there was no large difference between them, or between these two and many of their colleagues – I add, between these again and the young army of their pupils – in the nature of their vision of things in general. The Eton view of the world is not to be called narrow; it sweeps over a goodly space, as I have tried to show already – its

range isn't mean. It isn't a narrow view; but it is, so to put it, the one and only – the only one that ever was or will be, the only one dreamed of in any philosophy of reasonable men. It is genial and generous, I should hope: for why should a man convinced of his reason be afraid to be easy, to be unsuspicious? It isn't arrogant or assertive: for he is on his own ground and he keeps to it, a well-protected plot – with whom then should he strive? It isn't sceptical, it isn't troubled or chilled by disillusion: what room is there for doubt in a citadel so round and sound? And I suppose we shall agree that it is a view which is not mature; for a view which is the only imaginable, the only conceivable in serious argument, is assuredly one of youth. Your opinion of things may happen to be right and true and unassailable; but if it hasn't been compared with others, if you don't really know that another exists, it is a boyish opinion. And as for Eton's opinions and ideas, they were ever in this sense incorruptible. I am far from saying that Eton hasn't known of the existence of other ideas; but those others have appeared to Eton as aberrations, as deviations from the norm – from the straight right line of the ideas of Eton. It is evident, not for the first time, that Eton is very English; as England in Europe, so is Eton in England – the happy possessor of all the beliefs that are needed by a sane man and that no sane man can question. The two cases illuminate each other again and again.

Enough – I am not here to smile superior before

either of those two. But I can't catch the sound of the next voice that falls on my ear, voice of a hundred friendly associations, without staying to enjoy the tone of England and of Eton at their best. A tone of pleasant clean quality to begin with, and a tone of the broadest good-nature that is coloured with the easiest irony, and a tone of calm composure that isn't to be ruffled by novel and nonsensical fancies; an authoritative tone, as of one who knows what you desire and deserve more certainly than you can yourself, so you had much better let yourself be ruled for your good; and a tone, moreover, in which something like poetry, like an evergreen romance – (but I run on too fast, we mustn't blunder into poetry and romance without a more guarded approach): anyhow, to say all, it is the tone of the voice of Arthur Ainger. At once on the mere word he is before you, if you knew him – striding in his lean length through the playing-fields with his umbrella, striding but not hurrying, loose and leisurely of pace, faithfully accomplishing the adamant routine of his walk in all weathers; rather grim he looks, with his sunk cheek and dark chin, his uncompromising mouth; and then if you draw near him and catch his eye, such a change! – his grimness vanishing, his face irradiated with his beautiful slow smile. Ainger indulgently, welcomingly smiling was indeed a pleasant sight; there was an open hospitality in his greeting, in the light that broke through his iron-grey severity; behind his austere front you saw something lazy and easy, a well-sunned humour and

tolerance, a charm enhanced by his magisterial air. To a boy his manner was delightful, benign with dignity; he descended to a world beneath him and was perfectly at home there, yet never pretended it was his. He dismissed the boy with a cordial sarcasm and a benevolent smile, he strode away through the rain; and I ask myself what you would take him for, if you saw and didn't know him. For a schoolmaster, I suppose: his calm and kind authority with the young would reveal the school, no doubt; his academic speech and jest betrayed him. But his large detachment, with no strain or fuss of responsibility in his style, his lenity, the blandness of his assumption that all is well and nothing amiss with you – these are qualities we don't call scholastic, though we find them at Eton.

The time came when I was one of those whom he would ask to breakfast on a Sunday morning. There were then few of our masters, I wonder there were any, who retained this habit of other days; but if there is bleakness in the thought of it there was none in its practice by Ainger. To enter his breakfast-room, I always felt, was like returning home – returning, that is, to the warm safe region of holiday, where there is no rawness of early school in wintry dawns, no smell of ink and bare boards, no stampeding down noisy stairs at the sound of a bell. Sitting at breakfast with Ainger by a bright fire, with a row of silver dishes behind you on the sideboard, you breathed an atmosphere of comfort and civility – of the wittiest refinement I don't say,

for the note of his company was an unexacting give-and-take, with plenty of good things to enjoy and time for their enjoyment, rather than any rare or cultivated art: all the more home-like indeed for that. He was the most reassuring host; he bade us help ourselves, look after ourselves, and then he ignored the cares of serving; he showed no anxiety for our entertainment, such as embarrasses and cramps us in helping ourselves. So we ate pleasantly, and of what there was to talk about we talked – not straining, not clutching at things to say, accepting them as they passed. It becomes more and more like home. The topic of the day sufficed us, and Ainger took it up with an ironic comment, shrewd and wise; and we found that he knew all about it, the inwards of the situation created by the scandalous decision in connection with the last school-match – he knew more than we knew ourselves, and his comment was searching; and yet he was above it, he surveyed it with paternal amusement, while he didn't belittle our natural concern. Great kind easy-mannered Ainger, with his stern looks and phrases, his disarming smile, his endless hospitality, he was a despot in arranging the affairs, the desires, the opinions of other people to his liking, but he was an indulgent friend to youth. I wonder how many thousand Etonians, from first to last, enjoyed good things of his providing.

The time came also when I was up to him in school. Here again was serenity, but here, as was proper, we were introduced to his scholarly culture. Ainger was a

scholar of the purest strain of Eton; he turned his Latin couplets with a suavity that recalls that other old scholar and friend, him of the Kentish coast – they were bred in the same tradition of elegant classicality. Ainger was the author, not only of the words of our school-song, our 'Carmen' – which had long since become so completely a part of our heritage that we almost thought it had descended to us from ancient times – not only of this, but of many other songs that we sang in the vernacular; his Latin was more lapidary than his English, but both were vocal. And in his school-teaching he escorted us through the classics, not indeed with ecstasy, rather with sober Etonian grace; he polished our rude construings till the old poets shone out smooth and lucid, patterns of literary deportment for all time. I remember him especially in the company of Virgil. The charm of Virgil was ever at its most pensive, most appealing, as we read the Eclogues with Ainger – whose voice, I can hear it, quite changed, rose and fell in new mellifluous curves, when the Mantuan spoke through him in English both picturesque and chaste. Here is that romance that I began to speak of, romance that colours Ainger's tone while he lingers with his memories of Sicilian hill-sides, pastoral pipings among myrtle and juniper; he has been there himself, he describes the scene, and I think I owe to Ainger my earliest notion that it really exists, that sun-baked cicala-haunted south. This is certainly romance; but the romantic mood is reflective, dwelling pleasantly on blue distances

it softens the voice, not breaks it. True great poetry is a deeper note, not so easily controlled; and there were moments when Ainger, from mellifluous, became gruff and abrupt. I like to think of them, but here we don't pause; we respect his embarrassment and proceed.

Ainger fostered Eton like his child – despotically, as I say, but with all his influence thrown so largely and calmly in the line of Eton's natural bent it could never seem harsh; he commanded, but his command to the flowing tide was to go on flowing. If England and Eton were prosperous, agreeable-looking, mannerly, if they owned the beliefs that are right and sane, if they were clearly fitted to adorn and direct the world, the most determined autocrat need have nothing to say but '*fais ce que voudras.*' And if these pleasant heirs of the world had also a taste for Virgil, the age was the more to be congratulated. As for their moral worth, the virtue of their character – what of that? We have learned by this time, you remember, that the young heirs can't step into their inheritance as lightly as once they could; they must do much to earn it. But perhaps after all we may find that good looks and good manners go very far. Everybody feels their charm, so much so that charm may prove a more potent master than any autocrat. And then – for of course we don't pretend that to be pleasant is all – perhaps there is no lasting charm that isn't soundly founded upon worth. This, to be sure, is a belief that must be handled carefully; it is one to be protected, if you cling to it, from the shock of

everyday experience. But really, when you look at these boys, watch their modest manners and listen to their ingenuous talk, will you believe that there is any great harm in them? Why not believe the best of them? – it may indeed be the very way to evoke their best. Send them forth with a blessing and see if they don't come back to you in after years, bearing their sheaves. Ainger's blessing they had at any rate, the agreeable young people, and I hope they didn't disappoint him. Whether or no they did, there were always more and more of them to be blessed; a schoolmaster's faith in humanity has always this support, that he lives continually with promise, with the hope of the future, with the green tree and not with the dry. If his own heart is evergreen in such conditions, well it may be – especially if he isn't one to look and ask for trouble where none appears. Ainger, in short, loved Eton and loved youth – loved Eton paternally and youth with trustful kindness. This long unclouded friendship was among the best and most solid of Eton's possessions for many a year.

XIII

SHALL we take a tour through the playing-fields, and shall I dwell upon the memories that hail me from the levels of green turf, from the shade of the embowering trees? – and shall we then, after passing over Sheep's Bridge and skirting Upper Club, cross the Slough Road and gain the outlying grounds beyond, those pleasant meadows edged with willows and slow streams? Let it be a summer's evening: and then we watch the scores and scores of white-shirted grey-trousered young creatures, intent upon their games, standing alert, flitting and flashing, calling their brief cries in clear voices above the perpetual crack of ball on bat – a delightful harmony of sight and sound, you will allow, in the golden light. And then if we dare we might thread a path among the various groups, evading the danger that falls from all quarters of the sky, and so approach the long line of the fives-courts; but now it must be a gusty afternoon of February, grim and grey; and then we find in each of the courts, side by side, a springing and leaping quartet of the young people, furiously engaged, while the air is filled with the light volleying rattle of the little balls, all down the row, and again with the clear brief cries of the players; and this too

is an engaging picture of young agility, bright with points of colour under the steel-grey sky. And then a further walk may be taken, around and about, to more distant fields in the offing here and there; and now it will be calm moist autumn, and out in the open field you see a small surging crowd of white shirts, racing and veering, scattering and massing, while the ball flies up with great thuds or is lost under the scrambling shirts, daubed with mud. All round the year and all over the place you may pursue them, under every sky; and on some other summer evening you may follow a winding lane, when the wild-rose is flowering in the hedges – past Cuckoo Weir, all a chatter and splash of bathers, to the broad curves of the river-bank at Upper Hope, where the long slim boats go sliding up and down the stream, ruffling over the surface like water-insects. On every day of each school-half you may see the young people, here or there or everywhere, toiling at their games.

This huge unpausing roundabout of pastime, it doesn't maintain its pace without infinite care and forethought, as we know; there is nothing unpremeditated in these revels. Do you suppose that the boys come tumbling out of school, rejoicing in their release, to disperse to their games on the inclination of the moment – to fly to the field or the river, the court or the wicket, as fancy dictates? No such freedom is theirs. The great machine is prepared for the ordering of their sports, as of their lessons in school; it catches and despatches them to the pleasure prescribed. Do they make their own

compulsion, do they themselves invent that immense particularity in the scheming and ordaining of their delights? – or is it imposed on them by authority from on high? They simply don't know; so it is and so they accept it. Certainly they are firm in enforcing it, as utterly as they may, on any young rebel or fugitive in their midst; they aren't tender to eccentricity, they hold the rods of discipline and they don't neglect them. But this tells you nothing of the origin of the great machine. Even if they have but acquiesced in its rigour, with the patient fatalism of youth, it is only another and a perfectly natural step in submission if they have embraced the rule, made it their own, shown themselves eager to assert it. Anyhow there it is; and I own that even in the security of my years, as I watch their devoted youth at a distance – as I admire the pretty picture of the nimble white shirts in the golden light – I own that I am chilled by the thought of all that method, all that gear and plant of mechanism, which wears such a deceptive look of spontaneity at play. What is the true sum of the real fun – do let us ask – that demands to be planned so elaborately? Is the joy so general and consummate that it is worth the whole of its cost in forethought, in contrivance, in accoutrement – and in coercion too, where some won't enjoy themselves according to plan? A vain question, I allow: we shall never know the answer, for the young revellers on the roundabout don't know it themselves. Mighty is the machine that is accepted as a matter of course.

But what, do we live for enjoyment, do we play for the fun of it alone? Oh surely not: we leave our toilsome occupation to tramp or bound or caper at our sports for our good, for their noble effect upon our forms and natures. If we don't it is a shame – and a shame from which at least the young may be guarded. Never mind their fun: consider the blooming of their looks, the brightening and fortifying of their characters, in the rigour of the game. Against their looks indeed there is nothing to be said; they are a picture for anybody's admiration, a gift of high value to a world that destroys so much more beauty than it makes. And if we could read their characters as easily as their faces, perhaps we should say the same; perhaps we should see, matching and growing with the excellence of their limbs, the manly glory of their virtue – both alike to be ascribed to the ordeal by play. Fortitude, self-rule, public spirit – measure in victory, firmness in defeat – isn't it demonstrable that these and a dozen other prizes of honour, not of the material kind, are offered to those who compete in the school of games? Yes by all means, they are offered, and perhaps it is remarkable how often they are won: remarkable I call it, for it is surely clear that youth in that school is unfairly treated. The good prizes are mingled so insidiously with the bad (and you know what *they* are) that if youth confuses them I don't think youth is to be blamed. The blaze, the vogue, the glittering plume – that have never by any chance bewitched a more elderly head – seemed once, strange to

say, no trifles. Once too, how long ago, there was enticement in the thought of a triumph of one's very own, not merged inconspicuous in that of others. And to crown all, I declare that in our youth there was a time when passionate and prolonged competition, stimulated by dazzling rewards, encouraged by all the voices of the air, didn't tend only towards a balanced moderation, only towards a single love of the thing done for the doing's sake. How long ago! But it is worth while to remember that the testing of youth isn't necessarily, because it is searching, also fair.

Suave mari magno: I stroll in my security through the playing-fields, counting the blessings of my time of life, of my age too old for school. The dangers of publicity and triumph were indeed no menace to me; by the tarnish of extravagant emulation I was utterly unstained. But though I was so blest I recall how it was for others, how they strove, how they stood forth in the blaze – how merciless was the pressure on them of the faith in which they were bred. Don't, if we are to speak seriously, let us imagine for a moment that young people have embraced the faith thus vehemently of their own free will. Impatient irreverent young people, it isn't their natural way to be so resigned and devout; they wouldn't amuse themselves in such strict orthodoxy if they had their chance, they aren't responsible for their bondage. Are their schoolmasters then responsible? Partly they are, to be sure – who doubts it? Why, here in the playing-fields you may count, from where you

stand, the swarm of the sunlit figures, all in view, all occupied and harmless; and we can easily sympathise with the schoolmaster who strolls and surveys them, sees them all ordered and peaceable, and passes on with a mind at rest. He isn't the first ruler who has been helped in his government by the use of a popular cult, by the discipline of a crowd-compelling faith. But as for him, he only wields the power that is placed in his hand by another; he didn't discover or devise it for himself. And that other, who is it but the world, the world of our easy-humoured Eton-minded race, bowing to its games in many a plain or grove as sacred as Upper Club? Turn your eyes from Eton to a thousand other grassy fields or bowery courts, and mark the devotees of all ages – not so pleasant to watch, maybe, not so slim and airy as these of Upper Club, but no less earnest, solemn indeed with all the weight their years have brought them. These are they who have laid the huge mass of their opinion upon our too tractable, too helpless Eton. It is the opinion of the English home; you can't argue with it, as you know if you have tried, and young and irreverent as you may be, your slimness is no match for its portliness, to throw it off. All I can say is that when you are slim no longer you will have your chance; and indeed it is pleasant to wander again through the playing-fields, free to play, free to worship where you please, and some degree of portliness seems a small price to pay for that freedom. I hope that you in your turn won't add your weight to the old opinion – that it

is good for the young to be solemn and orthodox in play.

Did I say that our schoolmasters, having satisfied themselves that their charges were sporting on the green, out of harm's way, then passed on? Some may have passed on, among them certain well-known forms – who, their tribute of approval paid to the decorous activity of the boys, proceeded afield for their afternoon's walk and talk. But most of them, I think, stayed to watch; in knots and groups you might see them, following the spin or whizz or leap of the ball, judging and applauding the manner in which the ball is flung or hit or trundled. There is the right style of hurling, kicking, thwacking, and there is the wrong; and these onlookers were exquisite critics of style. You might hear them discuss the specimens before them, distinguishing the showy from the sound, the ornate from the pure, the racy and nervous from the plodding and pedestrian. Is your taste for a sumptuous and laboured effect, or do you prefer a swifter easier movement? – a Latin opulence or a Saxon simplicity? The question is debated in pregnant phrases; you won't find much that escapes these trained and thoughtful critics. Nor did they only criticise; some were themselves creators of the finest art, and these and many more would appear among the shirts upon the green, playing their part. If it was for their pleasure to do so they won't be grudged their pleasure; but there was more in it than that, no doubt – they had other rewards in the popular fellowship of the

game. This virtue we can't deny to the game, that it is a leveller, a uniter of classes; a temper reigns upon the green in which authority, the arbitrary thing, is put down from its seat. A schoolmaster who isn't in love with his authority is pleased to see it levelled in the field; and perhaps it returns to him in official hours, renewed and revived by its contact with the equal earth. Perhaps his rule is confirmed by his zeal and good humour in all that democratic jostling and tumbling. Don't, however, let him build on this hope to extravagance; for the perversity of the young is beyond words, and whoever thinks twice of their favour, how to win it, may very soon be paying dearly for his thought. If he enjoys a tumble he may take it; if it is taken with conscience and purpose it isn't likely to be blest. But I don't presume to suppose that a schoolmaster needs any teaching in this subject, the mercilessness of the young.

The game – (but not the jostling sort, for this is a summer's afternoon, and rites less furious are celebrating) – the game, considered closely, strikes and has ever struck me, since I first had time to reflect on it in safety, as surpassingly odd to be played by the young at school, with the blessing of the powers. It is a respectable game, I don't deny, worthy to be played by men of leisure and position, who are free to devote the years of their prime to a game. But for the young! For them, if you were devising a suitable and natural diversion, what would you assume were the essential needs of their play? In the first place it should be brisk and

concise, shouldn't it? – it should fill the numbered hours of relaxation compactly, rounding off to its finish in a punctual victory for the strongest party. Clearly it mustn't be a game that may drag itself out to indefinite length – a game that may have to be left hanging undecided, when the hours are up – a game which there mayn't be time for any one to win; you couldn't commend such a sport as that to impatient young people. And again, this merit it should have, that it keeps them busy all the time, the whole pack of them; you would never choose a game, if such there be, in which at any moment half or nearly half the players are sitting out, like dummy hands, with nothing to do but to wait till their turn comes round again to tread the field. That singularity is surely ruled out as of course. And then you must think, if you are kind and just, of the poor young creature who isn't brilliant, isn't adroit in handling or beating a ball; and also, if you are wise, you must think of the other youth whose skill is conspicuous, but after all his head is young, and the plaudit of the crowd is very lovely in his ears, and glory is a potent draught; and anyhow, with both of them in mind, you will look for a game in which nobody is glaringly exposed or exhibited above the rest, at any moment, for fame or shame. Haven't we sketched out the character of an excellent amusement, for use in schools? And now look at the rites that are proceeding before us – mark how they fulfil our three conditions. Well, cricket – so one of Ainger's songs proclaimed – is king; and the

king, at least in Eton and in England, can do no wrong.

Strange how even at this late day I feel it a piece of daring originality to be insinuating (in a strain of guarded irony, you see, even now) charges against the king. As a rebel of more tender age I wasn't any bolder, you may be sure; and indeed my age had acquired some toughness in use before I was anything of a rebel. In earlier days I made the great refusal, not in revolt, but only in flight, and even my flight was too often intercepted. And this was a poor soul who has always had the gift of most easily, most harmlessly amusing himself; but at school it wasn't decent to amuse yourself, as I quite understood, even harmlessly – (what nonsense, what ineptitude it is!) – unless you happened to be amusable in congregational order. And it isn't a case of an unfortunate exception, too rare to be provided for. As for that, let me reveal a secret, one that has been well kept for nearly forty years. My mind goes back to a small but labyrinthine house at Eton, long since demolished; it stood where the great School Hall now stands, and my first year at Eton was spent in it. At one end of a dark passage in that house, on a shelf, lay a book, a blank book in which our names were inscribed; and each of us against his name had to place in the course of the week a fixed number of crosses, each cross to indicate that one had played, at the requisite time and place, the requisite game. 'Playing one's times,' it was called; and if by the end of the week one hadn't accumulated

the right tale of crosses one suffered – the captain of the house saw to that. But luckily it was left to our honour to make those entries in the book for ourselves, without cheating. Now there were certain afternoons when it was physically impossible for the captain and his supporters, owing to other engagements, to appear upon the scene of our games; and you may suppose that we carefully studied their engagements. The book lay always accessible in the passage. Well, you may guess the rest: the due number of crosses was against each name at the end of the week, and we had all, no doubt, received a valuable lesson in the tonic virtue of compulsory games. I hope that nothing I have said will have the effect of hampering or embarrassing the young shirker of to-day; but I have no real fear of this, for we may trust the ingenuity of small boys. It passes, the unconventional age of twelve, and you can hasten its passing if you will; you can easily speed the change from curious inquisitive twelve to conformable sixteen. But what am I saying? All this was long ago; those cares and crosses, for all I know, have vanished as the dark passage and the tortuous old house. It had a low cream-plastered front upon the road; at the back it was of Georgian brick, and there was a small green garden.

I return to Upper Club in serener mood, and I see a school-match in progress: an event that had ever its convenience, for it could be argued that to watch a school-match was proof of such a patriotic enthusiasm as to excuse the shirker and the loafer – it wasn't

loafing to admire and applaud our heroes. I was more than ready to do so; the afternoon slipped away in talk and ease, under the elms. On such an occasion the spectators would be many and various – from us, industriously applauding over our gossip, to older and more serious students of the field, themselves aspiring to the state of heroes – and so to our masters and their wives, not without a sprinkling of visitors from without, old Etonians who perhaps had declined from the state of heroes, wearing the colours of their prowess in their ties. The old Etonians I don't distinguish, whatever their state; but a certain figure round which they gather, that of a man affectionately hailed by many of the strangers, is familiar to us all. This is he who appears in the list of our house-masters as R. A. H. Mitchell – we call him 'old Mike'; and he is here to watch the match with the interest of a father – literally of a father, maybe, for he has sons of renown in the school, but also figuratively, for of all the Eleven his care is parental. Old Mike had his division that he taught in school, like the rest; and what he taught it might be hard to say, but it was most peaceably, most amiably done. He had also a house, whose annals were long and lustrous. But in the eyes of the rest of us, who weren't of his pupils, he held a position that was other and peculiar; he guarded and guided the cricket of the school, at least on its more exalted levels, and of the Eleven he was known to be the genius, the friend and critic ever at their right hands. We see him leaning loosely on his stick, while he smiles

on his old foster-children of the parti-coloured ties and greets them in his quiet clear voice, musically toned. Are you ever displeased to hear at a school of somebody called the 'games master,' odious phrase, and do you picture the strenuous wretch, with his barbarous professionality, before you see him? Then you know what old Mike was not. What he was may be seen in his long-limbed ease, in the charming courtesy of his smile, may be heard in the soft clarity of his speech. The old Etonians clustered round him, hailing their friend.

The thought of old Mike brings with it a long story: not a story that I know well enough to tell, but the tone of it is deeply familiar. Big parties in big old country-houses, where the lawn spreads out to the park, the park to the cricket-ground; where the weather is bountiful in August holidays, and hospitality is large and easy, and the young men in their colours and flannels are a cheerful band; and where the jests and anecdotes, flying to and fro, have a double refrain and need none other – Eton and cricket, the cricket of Etonians, the Eton of cricketers; where too, moreover, when time has run on and the young men aren't so young, the refrain is recalled, the jokes live again, not less robustly if a little more lengthily – and the old band, with gaps in it now, is replenished by new young colours and flannels, with a new refrain that is still the same as the old: all this legend and story, descending from the years to the years, this epic of the country-house and the cricket-week and the holiday-party, is

brought to mind by a vision of Mike in Upper Club. Whatever is sunny and kindly, honest and sweet, not tyrannical, not oppressive, in the fellowship of the game in the fields of Eton, this he expresses and illuminates as he stands there, propped on his stick, with his straw hat tilted over his eyes, quietly genial with his friends, narrowly attentive to the play. As for the epic story, I don't say that it is powerful in idea, rich in thought, nor even that it is entrancing in humour. Perhaps it is, if you look at it coldly, rather a thin old story to be told of so much youth, so much freedom and well-being, so much beauty of England and of Eton; with all that has gone to the making of it you might expect a greater tale. But nobody can say that it isn't kind and honest; and whatever other reflections, honest if not so kind, are bred in the course of a tour in the playing-fields, on this one they may end – with the sight of old Mike, bending his loyal and careful attention upon the Eleven at their game.

XIV

ONE Sunday morning after chapel I was invited to visit a certain charming and spacious Eton garden – invited thither, and not a little flattered to be invited, by its owner and creator, a master of high and venerable standing in the school. His garden was very remarkable. It lay apart from the houses and the street, secluded in an unaccountable network of branching streams; for the Thames at this point scatters itself into several meandering channels, willow-shaded waterways that coil and twist and are gathered again into the great weir-stream that washes Fellow's Eyot and the playing-fields; and on one of the broad island-patches between the water and the water this beautiful garden lay remote,[1] a place of green alleys and vine-trellises and rose-beds, of trim borders and shaven turf, of orchards and wildernesses and glowing flower-drifts in the meadow-grass. The hand of a garden-lover had fashioned the whole of it, from the breadth of the open lawn in the midst to the deepened shadow of the further recesses – and a hand, moreover, that draws back and is stayed at the right point, the point where the loose spring-flowering of the meadow and the river-bank,

[1] And still lies there, now secure in the possession of the school.

left to itself, slips from under the fringe of the garden and rambles away in freedom. It is an enchanting place to visit on the first Sunday morning of June, especially when you are feeling rather proud of the invitation offered you in stern but friendly tones. The owner of the garden leads you round, grimly pointing out its failures and shortcomings, the flowers that won't come up, the weeds that won't stay down: see where the floods of last winter have exactly chosen his iris-pool for the worst of their havoc. But there *is* a kingfisher; it is nesting in the steep earthy bank that faces the little hornbeam-close and the bathing-ladder. The blue streak is there and gone again as you reach the spot.

Such was Luxmoore's garden. And of Luxmoore himself, how shall I begin to speak? For the moment I can only walk by his side again, shy but flattered, while he conducts me through the green alleys – shy indeed, but highly appreciative of my welcome, though his queer whimsical irony is a little beyond me and I can't be sure that I understand his humour. No matter, there is much to notice. Luxmoore led his visitor round the domain, on and on to the grassy point of the island, whence you look across the great shining flood of the weir-stream. And here, when you turn, is a familiar sight that is curiously new. Chapel, our own old chapel, seen for the first time from this point of view, lifts up its high-shouldered mass over the foreground of meadow and bowery garden with a grave beauty that may well

appeal to me as never before. Eton is so shaped that you get this clear free vision of chapel nowhere else. Either you are too close under it elsewhere, as in school-yard, where the buttresses run away above you into the sky; or else, as you see it from the outlying fields, it is masked about by other buildings and chiefly shows a line of slender pinnacles on a long grey back. But here you really see it: a building austere in its exceedingly simple lines, eight great perpendicular bays in order, all alike – a mere length of chapel-masonry, as you might say, cut off arbitrarily at either end, in that unfanciful English manner of the fifteenth century that is slighted by some; and a building, be it remembered, which is by no means all that our Founder intended it to be, for he had plans and ideas of far larger scope; but a building which stands up beyond the greenery of the garden with a beauty that is somehow domestic and mild, in spite of its impressive stature – and that is also complete, in spite of its baffled history. It seems to me right as it is, even to the pair of impudent wooden belfries that peak the two small eastern turrets, answering on their higher level to the more decorous caps, close behind them, of the twin turrets on Lupton's Tower. It is a picture, and to see it as it should be seen you must go to the island-garden, if possible on a morning in June.

And you should have seen it, to my thinking, with the creator of the garden beside you; for though he says little, though he assumes no airs of possession in the

scene, he really helps you in the strangest way to understand and absorb it. One quick vehement exclamation of his delight in the day, the hour, the place, this might escape him; but he was mainly occupied with his desire to welcome and entertain you, with the old difficulty of finding light topics of interest for awkward youth; and conversation might even seem to hang fire a trifle by the time you reach this climax of the sun-bathed view of chapel and the tangled mass of the college-buildings to the right of it. But something particular was caught from his companionship at this point, something which his one short cry of admiration easily expressed. It would suggest to you that he positively fed upon the beauty of the view, that its colour and line and light could satisfy a kind of hunger – as though a man might have a need for beauty, a craving to nourish the eye and the mind with lovely things. To me that morning it might have seemed a far-fetched idea, put into so many words; but without words I could feel vaguely that the man beside me was getting from the day and the view a satisfaction beyond my own – yet I was very contentedly enjoying them too. Quite the like of his appreciation I hadn't seen before, or hadn't noticed, in another; it was more than the simple though poetic sense of well-being that for me was enough, it was more than the diffused and indiscriminate rapture over the beauty of earth to be seen in others; this man appeared, while he admired, to distinguish the very shade and tinge of his admiration. He presently speaks,

for example, of some pretty intricacy of light among the chapel-buttresses – or is it some happy queerness of irregularity in their serried lines? – anyhow he points to some detail that I hadn't remarked, and he speaks of it as though it were a pleasing peculiar habit that he likes to recognise in a very old friend. One sees that he watches and scrutinises a fine morning and a bowery prospect far more closely than the rest of us.

The explanation is this, that the man is an artist; and in order to understand what it means to be an artist I could hardly do better than to visit him in his house. I shouldn't fail to do so indeed, on the earliest opportunity, for his invitations, I repeat, were exceedingly gratifying to one not formed to dazzle. And so for the first time I entered Luxmoore's house. It wasn't beautiful without, the bald yellow-brown block that looks over the meadow towards the island-garden; nor was it beautiful within, I should say – the word is too easy – but rather haunted and thrilled by beauty through and through. The restraint of austerity subdued the rooms where Luxmoore lived and worked – subdued all form and all colour to the purest, excluded superfluity, cleared the way for a serious working life. This first: no luxuriance, even of the best, was permitted in the good grave light of these rooms. And then, striking through the quiet light, the gleam of beauty was here, there again, everywhere; nothing but beauty caught the eye, shining in the wash of air by the window, glinting

in the shadow of a darker corner. The life of labour and discipline had need of nothing but beauty after all; for it appeared that even the sternest rule of austerity implied nothing crude, harsh, unsightly – it needn't flaw its perfect seemliness by anything but beauty. And remark that the exquisite gleam, rewarder and sweetener of toil, is no indulgence lavished for your comfort. It is all about you in these rooms, and yet it is sparing and fastidious; and it is given you to quicken your eye, to nerve your devotion in life and duty, not to ravish you away from these. The artist is the last of all men to rest at ease on beautiful things; he works, he creates, whatever his art, and having wrought his best he is refreshed by one rare draught of sweetness, and so to work again. Luxmoore sat surrounded by his treasury of wonders – so they seemed to me – not as other people sit, relaxing and sinking; he was always taut and light, quickly on his feet again, ready for work.

I must try to describe him. He was a small man, spare though sturdy of build, young in movement. Nothing in his appearance was remarkable except his head, and his head was of a singular magnificence. His iron-grey hair, turning to silver in the years I speak of, was thrown back thick and loose from his forehead and hung in a wave upon his neck, grey and silver upon brown. His face, clean-shaven, nobly, rather grimly lined, ruddy and well-seasoned, with penetrant eyes, strong-arched nose and resolute mouth–his face

confronted the world with a Gothic grandeur, as it might have been the face of some abbot-statesman, some warrior-churchman of ancient days. An abbot of ascetic stringency, no more tender of his flock than of himself; a saint perhaps, not of those to whom sainthood is an easy crown; a fighter, one at least who has withstood the enemy, without or within; a heresiarch, lonely in an exacting and unyielding faith: these might all be seen or imagined in the look of that face, with its deep and eloquent lines. A face to fear, it can't be denied, if you saw it in repose: a look of judgment, with no promise in it of a drop more of mercy than he has ever extended to himself, and that much is clearly none at all. But are we to confess that we are frightened of justice? The world is a poor thing if it can't stand up to its sentence, knowing it just – if it can't perceive, what is more, the beauty of a look so grand and strong, turned upon a world of casual half-believers. Luxmoore, among the pleasant crowd at Eton, might appear as a living rebuke to our heedless ways, with such an expression of solitary sternness he passed through the crowd. But that was a stranger's view, and as for us, we knew the worst of his rebuke – I shall presently tell what it was, the worst of it. For us, for Eton, he was solitary indeed among the easy-going company; but he stood alone, not in dreadfulness, rather in a peculiar lustre, upholding a banner with a strange device. He was the one to carry it – the duty was appropriately his, with that head; for the device, I don't know how it

might be put in one word, but it stood for the high and ardent love of beauty. Luxmoore was our artist; I am not sure that we had another.

It was narrow, it was bigoted, it was repressed and encroached upon by many a prejudice, Luxmoore's passion for beauty; it suffered much from an obstinate fear of the devil and his works. No matter, it was the passion, the real thing; and if there was any opportunity, in my day at Eton, of discovering the heart of that fire, Luxmoore provided it. Culture you may look for and find elsewhere, as we have seen; but this is something very different – not a mere diffusion of light, but a flame. It will be long before we see it burn more intensely than it burned in Luxmoore, notwithstanding how he hid it, screened it and denied it air. He worshipped beauty, but he couldn't trust it. The sacred fire, reduced to one clear rose-red sparkle, steadily shining, that you can cover with your hands, this is well; but still it is fire, and at your peril you play with it, sacred if it is. The only safety is in knowing its danger; and then you are on the watch, you aren't betrayed into rash and wilful experiment with the treacherous devourer. But an artist, perhaps you say, is no artist if his passion isn't braver and more generous than this; to be jealous to this degree of beauty and its might is dishonour done to it, nothing better. Dishonour it is indeed, if his jealousy is only fear, an eye for danger; but there is another side to it. Knowing Luxmoore, we can't make the base mistake of dividing the esthetic

passion from the moral, where they are one – as they are one in some few rare spirits, such as his. Beauty was his desire, seen or unseen, known or imagined, and all of it alike for no other reason than for its own sake – for beauty's sake or for the glory of God, it is no matter how you phrase it. Narrowness and prejudice, whatever in our wisdom we are inclined to call by these names, can't rob this desirous ardour of the name which is its right; moral, esthetic, according as you look at it on this side or on that – but all of it together is artistic, for it ensues no end that is commoner or worldlier than itself. Luxmoore seemed to desire that souls should be saved by beauty. 'By something above beauty,' I suppose he would have said; but the phrase is immaterial. Beauty and that which he set above it were alike divine and beautiful, the home of the desirous soul.

These are grave words, graver perhaps than I ought to use of Luxmoore. For the stern front with which he cleft the crowd – stepping quickly, bending forward, not to be distracted from his quest: whenever he left his house, were it only to pass down the street to his school-room, he had the air of having shouldered his scrip for a pilgrimage – his stern aspect dissolved, his rebuke became an eager welcome, when he hailed his guest and entertained him in an unofficial hour. There was nothing to be afraid of. Nay, he was even a little afraid of his guest, if it isn't absurd to think so; at any rate he was shy, he was anxious in providing for your enjoyment;

and as shyness wore away between you, and his ironic reserve grew less disconcerting, he allowed you to see that he was gratified by the attentions of the young. In the company of our elders, moreover, so far from impressing them with his severity, he seemed to be treated with a vein of humorous indulgence; he was challenged and bantered, not at all as a figure of perilous rectitude, daunting to levity. He enjoyed this easy handling of his awfulness; he protested, he cried out, he sat and rocked with laughter under the assault. He was driven to the wall, protesting to the last, clinging to the standard of his lonely principle; and the freedom of Eton speech pursued him and derided his stubborn virtue. These were agreeable scenes, watched perhaps by some young onlooker with the highest appreciation. And Luxmoore's strokes, with his back to the wall, were far from irresolute. In that deep peculiar voice of his that I find so hard to describe – like a kind of melodious rumble, like a growl of thunder spun out to fineness and softness – with an accent of aggrieved and petulant humour he struck out, maintaining his professions against a world that so inveterately declines from the wisdom of its fathers. What an argument that was, between him on one side and several of his colleagues on the other, concerning – whatever it did concern, the wantonness of some modern improvement, held to be such, on the perfect and practical convenience of living in the thirteenth century. 'An argument?' I hear Luxmoore retort – 'if you call it an argument where

ego vapulo tantum!' His line was that of an honest but too simple victim, powerless to withstand the wit and the perversity of the bullying world. The story of his discomfiture lost nothing when he afterwards told it against himself.

XV

'WHY,' exclaimed Arthur Benson, 'is everything that Luxmoore does thought to be virtuous because he does it? What is there virtuous in dining at six o'clock instead of a reasonable time like other people? *I* should be thought very silly to do such a thing: why is it splendid of Luxmoore?' My tutor, leading the gay attack on Luxmoore's nonsense, had a slashing hand; he was at his gayest on these occasions, at his most unscrupulous and irresponsible. Or again: 'Why, if Luxmoore *likes* to get up early and dig in his garden, is it wonderful of him to do so? When *I* do what I like nobody says it is grand of me!' How unfair is opinion! – or does it perhaps divine a truth and an essential difference, though it may express the thing clumsily? At any rate there was, to be sure, a general sense abroad that all actions of Luxmoore must have high-minded motives behind them: how should they not have, issuing from that front so nobly severe? And altogether Luxmoore was surrounded at Eton with a delightful mixture of admiration that rebelled into amusement and resistance, of laughing affection that aspired to reverence; and he took it all, accepting this humbly and that gratefully – holding Eton to a rigid

account with his smiting judgments, lavishing upon Eton his royal generosity, his fidelity and his love. His place was apart, distinguished from the rest, and yet in a manner he was Eton's spoilt child, even playfully indulged; he might do what he pleased, it was splendid of him – at any rate it was *like* him, and who asks for more than that Luxmoore should be like himself? My tutor, to whom nothing was sacred, might ingeminate his cry; it was his peculiarity that he never could see a claim made, a pretension raised on any man's behalf, without pouncing to demolish it. But if he would join nobody in spoiling Luxmoore, he threw such joy into rallying and exposing him, pursuing and lampooning him in verse and prose, that he created round Luxmoore's sanctity a whirl of exhilaration – in which Luxmoore himself, ever protesting and twinkling, was discerned to be of all implacable censors the most human, the most intimately and trustfully to be loved.

But as for that habit of his to dine at six o'clock – because, if you please, it had an air of republican virtue and simplicity so to do – it was an affair of Sunday evening only, and his younger friends in the school were the gainers thereby. In twos and threes we were asked to dinner on Sunday – to an honest English meal, sharply to be discriminated for its flavour among all other entertainment at Eton. I have told how Ainger's dining-room had a warm and worldly atmosphere, and how at the Cornishes you met the wind of critical ideas;

and I could tell how to dine with Warre was like sharing the ease of a fine old bishop of the eighteenth century, at leisure over his wine. Other tables of hospitality I could describe, each with its note; but Luxmoore's is like none of them in the least, save for its bounty. Luxmoore was not of the world, it was clearly to be understood; he would have you perceive that he was much too plain, too homely and awkward for the brilliance of a liberal society; and this he maintained, by word or implication, while he sat at the head of his loaded table, the candlelight shining on the silver sweep of his hair, on the perfect sculpture of his countenance – while he broke out in his rich dry laughter over the story that he told us, wilfully and fancifully embroidering its droll conclusion. Not for society indeed: but anyhow here on Sunday evening, at a meal that was really 'high tea' (and a good thing too), he infused into the occasion a sense that it was a treat, a treat for himself and for us – not the sort of thing that is taken for granted out there in the world, where they sit at their dinners of an evening as a matter of course. We and Luxmoore were simpler folk, enjoying a Sunday treat in our sober working lives; and we didn't pretend to be more than we were, a school-party gathered over a meal more sumptuous than our ordinary. Luxmoore's virtue again, you see: he couldn't assemble us at a groaning board, for an evening of mirth and beauty, but it had to be a festivity more sterling, less idly modish than another. Of course he didn't put it thus; he merely

implied that it was good of me to forsake for an hour, in favour of this Spartan cheer, the Athenian elegance to which I was accustomed at my tutor's. But the grimness of Luxmoore's irony didn't discompose me by this time.

I was getting on. Indeed I was getting on a little too fast, belike, under the vivid influence of Arthur Benson. His teaching was a trifle heady for a devoted young disciple, with its offhand irreverence. Everything was easy to my tutor in those days, and it seemed to follow that nothing need be pushed beyond the limit of ease. The induction was made by his disciple, at any rate – who, if his tutor's facility left him far behind, could do his best to pretend to it, to imitate that lightness of hand and to flourish those airy opinions. I blush a little to think that when I now sat at Luxmoore's table, a lank-grown youth, I wasn't as pleasingly bashful and diffident as the right young people are. Well, it was no great hurt to any one, and if Luxmoore smiled at the youth's assumption of airs that weren't his own, let him smile – (not that he smiled, he only stiffened his ironic lip) – and let me remember that I was getting on. You don't, while you merely sit and please in seemly adolescence, make the most of the intercourse of your elders; and I can claim that of Luxmoore's tolerance of me, of his kindness to me, I made that which was soon to be a treasured possession. He was one of those who don't insist that the young shall have every grace of ingenuous behaviour before they earn toleration – and

this by no means because he didn't distinguish and delight in grace. Anyhow he admitted a youth – whose assurance, I must say, wasn't so very brazen – to practise a few new paces in the sun of his kindness; and his drawn lip was no terror, for the twinkle broke out above it, and his charity was active and eager in regaling his young friend. You will never turn some of us into mannerly members of society till you allow us a free hand with our own manners; we must flounder, not clinging to the traditional style that is prettier than our own, I don't deny. It is a small matter, but it has its due place in the awkward years; and so between Luxmoore's patience and my tutor's temerity there was much to be learnt. And after all I dare say that among our party at six o'clock on Sunday, cheerful and talkative, nobody was intolerably unabashed.

Afterwards, upstairs in that beauty-haunted drawing-room, Luxmoore under pressure would produce and display to us certain pictures – pictures of his own making, as delicious and as singular as ever I saw. They were paintings in water-colour, small and neat; he seemed to have scores and scores of them packed away, the harvest of hundreds of solitary hours in field and garden, in all weathers and all seasons. They were perfect like the finest needle-work, minutely reticulated with innumerable tiny stitches of colour; upon every scene a heart-load of loving scrupulosity had been lavished – you felt the artist had separately loved each twig and blade and bud as it was touched into its place.

I think the best of all were the pictures of winter, where the bare trees melted into distances of blue mist, where the brown leaves lay warm upon an earth that might look harsh and forbidding to one who didn't love it, but that indeed was harbouring depths of generous life against the return of spring. And in another picture the spring was there, and to meet the new young season the earth was smiling and flowering, with a twinkle and a sparkle which is all the more attractive because it breaks from a landscape that a moment ago was hoary and silent and repressed; yet it lights up benignly to greet the yearly resurgence of youth, and actually never itself grows old after all – for its heart is alive with inextinguishable sympathy for everything that is fresh and untried in the promise of spring, perpetually renewed in the familiar fields and the stream-circled garden. And as for the young season, it may seem to play thoughtlessly in the breeze and to be off on its airy way very soon and very lightly; but it does remember, and when it is no longer young itself it looks back gratefully – it looks back and sees, what I seem to be forgetting, a group of young people examining a series of water-colour paintings, delicious in their singularity, exhibited under pressure by the accomplished artist.

They were mostly views of Eton, and while I turn them over in mind I am tempted to say that nobody else, if I had my way, should paint any pictures of Eton. No doubt many others have done their best; the place in all its aspects has attracted generations of painters,

and in summer-time you may often see them at work on their little camp-stools, by Jordan or on Fellow's Eyot. They do their best; and indeed there was one, our dear old silvery-voiced delicate-handed drawing-master, Sam Evans, whom I shall admit as an exception to my sweeping rule; but saving him the artist of the exquisite embroideries in water-colour shall be the only painter for me of the portrait of Eton. There are those who think, because they can jumble their colours and slap them on the paper with the fashionable swoop or pounce of the brush, that they are thereby entitled to set up their camp-stools before any prospect of turrets and trees that may strike their eye. It is not so; they have no call or title to appropriate a scene if they haven't earned it by long fidelity; such is the rule, it is at any rate my rule at Eton. The trees and turrets of Eton are not to be ravished by any casual passer-by; they may only be touched by him who knows and understands and loves. And here he is; and he has used his title, this one, through many years, sitting out in all seasons and weathers to scan the face of his illustrious home, till he knows every line and form and tint of it by heart. He has long since discovered all the out-of-the-way corners and unvisited nooks from whence you may catch some gracious expression of Eton; he knows the exact light of misty morning or radiant evening, the ragged February gleam or the rich September glow, that will evoke the charm of its deepest intimacy. He loves the place with a son's piety, a lover's passion; you can see

it in his pictures at a glance. He and Eton, the two of them together, associated in the hundreds of hours that have gone to make these drawings – hours of quiet sunshine or turtle-winged cloud, through which they sit together in silence, communing deeply and fondly – here together they have helped me to begin my discovery that beauty and glory, bequeathed to us from of old, were all about me between the playing-fields and school-yard and chapel. I might have jogged to and fro on my path through the revolving weeks for years to come, with my own eyes I could never have seen all this that lay around it.

I began to be acquainted, moreover, with a spirit that informed the art, the thought, the life of Luxmoore – a presence of sovereign authority in all three. It is a spirit that we associate with a fountain of towering words, flashing and showering in colour and transparency; a spirit of eloquence, majestic and mournful, impassioned and indignant; a spirit that can't be silent, that flings out its strength and weakness alike without a shade of reserve: this is Ruskin – strangely foreign to Luxmoore's difficult shyness, to his seed of fire that was buried in a rock. And Ruskin's imperious command to gentle and simple to be good, to obey him, to trust their master; and his life so amply seated on comfort, supported on that broad mass of old-fashioned English prosperity, plain and solid; and his lordly ways that turn with a flounce to ill-temper when he isn't obeyed: with all this Ruskin might be a disconcerting

monitor for a man of humility so austere, of pride so fastidious – whose vein of passion dips so deep and sharp into a secluded soul. One may picture Luxmoore listening among his generation to the splendid thunder of the prophet; and while the rest of the congregation disperse, easily talking and admiring the fire of the discourse, Luxmoore goes apart in silence, smitten with the conviction of sin; and of all the thousands who were fluent in praise it is he, unheard and unseen, who sets about to refashion his works and days after the word of the preacher, abating no letter of its peremptory call. He proceeds to fulfil the commandment of the preacher to its utmost rigour – so at least we may suspect; but from him in his turn we shall hear no preaching, and all we shall get of him, if we insist, is some dry laconic confession of faith, rather shame-faced, that chiefly tells us of his failures and faults in the service of a great idea. The beginning of it, of Luxmoore's discipleship, dates back to his faraway youth; and to me, hearing in a late day of Ruskin as a legend of the past, it is all a haze of old and vague romance. Ruskin himself, if Luxmoore speaks of him, is now a veteran outworn, an aerial commotion long ago spent and sunk into silence; and Luxmoore will speak of him tenderly and loyally, with some familiar humour – will take down a volume, perhaps, and read us a page that leaves a pomp of music resounding from that day in my memory. Which of your later prophets, he seems to say, which of your heroes that have now the cry, will match you that?

Ruskin was the voice of a great idea, which by you young people may be thought an ancient tale; but you won't deny the perennial magic of the voice.

That is as much as we shall get from Luxmoore by way of preaching or proselytising. The great force that was in him, the greatest in its kind to be found at Eton, was tongue-tied; it couldn't utter itself to any effect that would widely impress the young. We soon pierced his grimness and reached his kindness, but we didn't easily arrive at his mind; and the spirit of his thought, all its hidden intensity and peculiarity, was hardly to be divined by us at all. The two men who had most to tell us at Eton, the two in whom the life of the mind (very diverse in accent) was vividest, Luxmoore and Cornish, both alike they lacked the speech that carries in the school-world, where the fainter echoes are so easily drowned. It is a waste that we certainly can't afford, but there it is; Cornish's unobtrusive word is lost in the uttering, and Luxmoore's, if it gets to utterance at all, is so curious and crabbed with his diffidence that you scarcely understand it. May we say then that it was no fault of ours if we didn't get greater profit from the teaching of these two? Of Cornish, yes: only the ear most finely trained could hope to catch him. But of Luxmoore, not so surely: though the fault was in Eton at large, not in us the young people – in Eton that wasn't much troubled to mark what he said, but rather to admire and indulge his splendour. It betrays the mental temperature of Eton, it must be allowed, to

observe that the ideas of Luxmoore, in art and life and in the commonalty of the two, were met with a smile – not by everybody, to be sure, but on the whole by the rulers of opinion. They were the ideas of no sane man, they were the crotchets of an artist – of an artist, if you like, and a saint; they had no descent that you could trace from the past of Eton. It never occurred to me, I never heard from any one the suggestion, that many people in the world had shared with our artist his imagination of a world made new – that many people had held this crotchet as a reasonable faith. And here we had a man amongst us, no doubt a man of a cabined and cloistered philosophy, but a man whose thought strikes out into the ugly disorderly life without, and there is linked with ideas that have been troubling the conscience of the world for many a long day; and of all this we learned nothing at all, if it wasn't for some smiling retort or allusion to Luxmoore's extravagance. One could pass through years and years of Eton in easy ignorance of all the strife that is waging over a question – is the world as rational or as comely as it has the power to be? – or not in ignorance, rather in some assurance that the question is answered quickly and briefly, answered and closed, by a sane man. That great flat hand, smooth and firm, which descends in the name of common sense to extinguish our fantasies, the heart drops at the sight of it. I wish Luxmoore hadn't been so humble that he couldn't preach.

The best plan would evidently be to frequent his

company as much as possible, so that at last one begins to perceive the manner of his thought behind the allusive difficulty of his speech. This plan, though without so conscious a purpose, I am proud to recall that I adopted from the first, and he was endlessly charitable in submitting to it. Strange little notes on tiny scraps of paper, written in that small fine hand that was more like drawing than writing, would appear on holiday mornings: Luxmoore thought of taking as many of us as would fit into a station-fly to visit that beautiful old house or that interesting old church in the neighbourhood, and there was room for me. And so we drove and talked and spent the afternoon among beautiful old things; and we had tea in the garden of an inn by the river, and Luxmoore was severely kind, dryly gay; and as always happened wherever he went, there was some odd misadventure or quaint discomfiture of his dignity – no matter, he covered it with the implacable rigour of his stern-set mouth, so that we hardly noticed it ourselves; and as we drove home he confessed, he told the tale with injured humour – once more the world had been too much for him, it is the old story. Not at all a serious afternoon: Luxmoore hadn't lectured or instructed us while we examined the old church; and yet one does become aware of the fulness of his mind, packed with rich and curious knowledge, ardent with its buried flame. More and more of it could be learned as time went on; and when Eton was left behind, still more, in a friendship unbroken to the

end. He lived to a great age, always at Eton, though at length in retirement from his work; he was the last to leave us of all the old friends who are saluted in this book. It chanced one day that his young friend, not now young, visited Eton in a damp gloom of wintry twilight, crossed the meadow to the wooden bridge under the hawthorn, the entrance to the island-garden, and sought him out where he was to be found as usual, among his borders and rockeries, in the bare and dripping alleys. He was on his knees in the mire, wielding his trowel, his great head bent over his labour. He turned to eye his visitor with a dark look, recognised him with a smile and a cry, and sprang to his feet, light and nimble in his years, holding out his large leather gloves in a welcome – how often had that happened since I walked with him for the first time in the garden? This was the last time; his hair was whiter, he was now a little hard of hearing – I find no other change in him through thirty years of unchanging friendship. Henry Elford Luxmoore: a great man, one of Eton's greatest. I add my leaf to many laurels on his grave.

XVI

I HAVE said much of the school, not much as yet of the house within the school; but it mustn't be forgotten that the compact little polity of the house is far more important, more real to most of us than the vague vast of the school without. Eton is a system, a cluster of spheres moving in conjunction together; and the life of the house is distinct inside its well-marked boundary, while the borders of the school are uncertain, defined by no visible limit. Into the house you are dropped, a morsel of lonely consciousness, at the beginning of your career; and you quickly know that the house too is a bunch of independent orbs, some forty of them, jostling at times in none too heavenly harmony; but still the roof of the house is over all, creating an unity that you can see for yourself, and the solitary scrap is a member of a state, of a world, with an outlook upon surrounding space. Out there are the other lights, the other houses, at first rather dimly descried, brighter or less bright – among them the anomaly of College, a dark star that, most unlike the rest in its abstruse inscrutability to the young oppidan; but as for the other houses, they swim into your experience in one way or another, they are revealed in their different tincts or magnitudes; and

so the school as a whole takes shape at last, though it is an indefinite jumble of a form compared with the trim tightness of your own particular commonwealth, your tutor's. Thus begins, thus grows and is strengthened, the flicker of patriotism – which can't spread faster or mount higher than your realisation of the world you live in; but gradually, as the circle of your view sweeps wider, it burns up into the brightness of a love for Eton, to which you know at last that you belong. (I don't mean that you won't at a much earlier stage be bawling in a crowd, as occasion may offer, your whole-hearted and annihilating hatred of everything that isn't Eton; but that is the herd-clamour of the lower boy, very well in its time, but a trifle savage to the eye that is yearly rising higher than the juvenile herd.) But if you aren't marked for a very grand supremacy in the school at large, then to the end the house is nearer, friendlier, more intimately safe and familiar, than the big generality of the school.

The house of which I tell, Arthur Benson's, was ruled by a very masterful man. He ruled it so easily, with so little expenditure of noise or fuss, that you mightn't notice at first how completely he held it in his hand. It was even supposed that he was lax in command, for he gave us law in many things wherein it was rigorously exacted by others; but he could afford to do so – he knew his power. He made no fidget, no boredom of discipline; but his authority was beyond a question, his will when he uttered it was final. It is strange how unmistakably one knows it, this force in a man which

it is useless to provoke; it was well known by us in Arthur Benson, though it had none of the obvious marks, no loud brow-beating tones, no steely looks. But it was certain that nothing could be done to thwart him when he descended to act. You couldn't weary his determination; it jumped out, when it did jump, quick and brisk, solely bent on despatching a tiresome business without loss of time that was precious to him. Perhaps it was that: he wouldn't make an occupation, much less a pleasure, of protecting and enforcing his rule; he didn't intend to waste good life in doing so. You couldn't therefore keep him in play (as you can so many) while you practised your arts of resistance or evasion. Down he came with his impatience, his spurt of annoyance that good life should be spent on so squalid an affair; there and then, on the spot, it was concluded. Young people are obstinate, and in persevering obstinacy a man may never defeat them; it feeds the joy of being a nuisance. But they aren't quick, they aren't resourceful in emergency, and it was here that this man could tackle us with one hand. If a man is as quick as he, no doubt he won't always wait for the most reasonable, most considerable argument; he will use the word that tells, the first and briefest. And occasionally it happens that the word is caught by a young mind that won't be convinced, though its speech may be silenced; and then, I dare say, the young mind works on, guarding its opinion of the argument to which it can't retort. It might so happen exceptionally; but on the whole this

promptitude, this instant dominance of a brain so sure of its demand, made a brilliant effect. You could never hope to match, to surprise or to delay it.

I can see him, I can hear him, when something called for the intervention of his power. His step in the passage, the audible breathing of his indignation – and he appears, large, light-haired, rubicund, the square of his shoulders impatiently flinging round the corner; and he stops short, surveying the scene. But not as though he were scandalised by this sinfulness, not as an outraged mentor: you couldn't suppose that he was solemnly shocked by a mere breach of discipline, which isn't after all such a very black affair. Nor did he seem to cry that it was just what he could expect of these naughty boys, he didn't appear as a school-usher all too used to scolding. His way was unlike either of these, both of which are so familiar. He hated a row, and here was a row; he hated it because it interrupted his work, because it was an ineptitude in a sensible society, because he wouldn't have *his* house behaving inanely and barbarously; enough, he hated it. The word didn't fail him; if he stared and fumed for a moment it was nicely judged; and then his phrase was about our ears, and his displeasure had a stroke that sent things flat, that deflated the exhilaration of a row – there was nothing exciting in his wrath. I can feel the gunpowder run out at my heels as he hisses his scornful word. And then he went, leaving flatness behind him. In due course we could giggle and repeat his phrase

and be witty at his expense, if he had known of it; but it was a weak point that he never knew of it, for nobody dreamed in his senses of any liberty that you could take with him, before his face. How could you begin to be a little, ever so discreetly or guilefully impertinent to his face? If begin you did, you wouldn't get far; his pleasant courtesy is instantly rigid, it doesn't yield a hair's-breadth to your wit – which is left on your hands as a most embarrassing burden. And with all this so easy-going when things are right, so civil and social: he knew his power, he knew that we very well knew it.

Our midday meal in the long low dining-room was always a session of interest, for those who were high enough in the house to sit within range of him, round the cross-bar of the T-shaped table. (Time has now moved on; we have long left the modest habitation of our early days; we are now installed in a pretty old house, like an enormously overgrown country cottage, that looks away in front over meadow and garden to the Castle, and at the back upon the green and deserted seclusion of the chapel grave-yard.) Better still, because more informal and casual, was our evening supper when he joined it; he would drop in for a slice and a crust when he wasn't otherwise engaged. And then the talk ran round the cross-bar with surely a remarkable lightness. He never appeared with the least fleck on him of the dust of the school-day; he dropped into his place as it might be at a symposium of friends whom he often saw, all comfortable together, but not so often

that freshness of intercourse had worn off; and presently out of the gossip of the morning a debate has sprung, and opinions are compared and argued, and the topic is spun with an amusing twist; and so it goes, day after day, and the entertainment never fails, I think as I look back, to give a change and a lift to the course of the school-hours, jolting them up into something airier and more liberal than their wont. It isn't discourse of the deepest; opinion runs in general towards a summary disposal of things, a short way with niceties and hesitations. We float off upon politics, personalities, the talk of the town; and we don't hammer or insist, we seem to agree that things aren't difficult or dreadful, let the wiseacres fret themselves as they ever will. Our host is the least pedantical of men; he sweeps your doctrine, your laboured principle aside, and jumps to his conclusion by the light of the experience, not indeed of plain men – for plainness is dulness – but of men active and practical, humorous and trenchant, enemies to the theorising of the schools. A lively wine it was indeed for a young head; it bubbled in the brain of a disciple, not for the steadying of his intellectual step, I must admit. But it may be that some of us need civilising first, and can wait to be intellectually fortified later on; and if this was true of any of us, here was our chance. I think that Arthur Benson made his house-party as little barbarous as any you will find at Eton.

And then, for the end of the day, there was the visit that he paid to each of us, according to the custom of

Eton, in our own rooms. The house-master, when the day is over and we disperse to our rest, makes his round; he visits everybody in turn, not with any formal or official intent, but in a spirit of friendly relaxation; he looks in, passes the time of day, lingers for a brief talk, and then good-night and on to the next. It may appear the most taxing of all his duties, when you ask yourself where you would find an easy word, a light handful of conversation, thirty or forty times in quick succession every night. What in the world can he devise to say, freshly varied in such iteration? The difficulty didn't enter my mind when my tutor visited me for the so-many-hundredth time. I was comfortable in bed when he reached my door; and he entered, very large in my minute domain, tilted the book in my hand to read the title – and here we are in a literary discussion, appraising the style of Stevenson, weighing the culture of Pater; and if I couldn't have said what I thought of either a moment ago, I shall now, graving my tutor's phrase upon my memory, know the words that exactly express my admiration of these authors for evermore. The finest of style and the richest of culture are shorter work for the critical mind than you might suppose. I have my judgment – and a good one too in its kind, a vivacious thrust into the matter, aptly delivered, with no subservience to received opinions – I have it safe in my keeping three minutes later, when my visitor smiles his good-night and is off; and I return to my book with a freshening light on my enjoyment of it. But not

that we are always bookish: everything has its turn, and to-morrow night we may start some absurdity, some anecdote of the quaintness of life – or some strangeness of an event in our midst, to be considered in its bearings – or some debatable point in the conduct of our house-affairs, with all its personal references; and my visitor, talking and questioning, drops into a chair and lengthens the minutes, very welcome to do so, with an announcement of his views and ideas and wishes that I eagerly absorb. Occasionally he is still more personal, and his remarks have an aim against myself which they certainly won't miss. He can easily make me writhe – so easily that he needn't lengthen this visit, and his smile as he departs is reassuring.

There was always an unprofessional air in his direction of us – not by design or purpose, not because he practised to be the schoolmaster who rejects convention (we have known that one!), but because he could never be subdued or awed by his profession. He was uncontrollably independent, always a rebel under any hand that would compel him, as for example the hand of scholastic tradition. What he could control, that he loved, and he threw his heart into his love for his house, into his pride in the young whom he managed and taught; these were his own, they belonged to him, and his own was always admirable. To him his profession as such, as a thing to which *he* belonged, had no title of respect, no shred of sanctity as a vocation; there was much in it for his dislike, much for his restive impatience; but there was something, his care for his boys,

that with his swift and dominant action he could grasp, and to this he never grudged his devotion. Yet devotion, do I say? It is the right word, as I now know well enough, but it isn't the word, with its too grave note, for the manner of his caring as it appeared to us, to the boys in his hand. It wasn't so grave on his side, the nature of the tie between us; he was our good-natured friend and host, whom we could easily annoy, more easily please; he liked our company, he showed that he liked it, but nobody could think that his happiness needed us, that his life were empty without us. On the contrary, we could feel that he tore himself away, when it was time to attend to us, from much that he hated to leave, other delights, other work of his own that he loved; it was clear that his whole interest wasn't in ourselves. Perhaps it was no unwholesome ingredient in our day, this notion that we weren't of such importance as all that; it implied that we had to give as well as take – to be reasonable guests, where he was a considerate host. This was an atmosphere both light and sane. A responsibility was thrown upon us, but nothing oppressive; he worked for our welfare, and he expected us to meet him in friendliness and sense. With all this there ran through our routine, keeping it alert, a stir and bustle of movement, of talk, of social comity, very refreshing as the long weeks drag themselves out through the half, through the seasons, through the everlasting years.

His work which he loved, from which he tore himself unwillingly away, we quite understood to be his writing

– his poetry it was in those days. Here and there in the course of the week came an hour that he could snatch to himself, and he hoarded it; in that hour he was invisible, he vanished to some inner retreat where nobody could penetrate on any pretext. The outcome, twice, thrice in the years when I was under his roof, was a volume of poems – which now, this day as I write these lines, I take down and re-open for the thrill that is released from its pages, those pages soft and rich like drawing-paper, with the 'deckle edge' that is to me as the very sign and connotation of poetry. To tell the truth I found the poems rather odd, with a peculiar choice of epithet and ornament that I mightn't have known for poetry if it hadn't been his; and I lacked the convenience in this case of learning my opinion from himself. But to shut yourself up in your room and to write poems with a dashing pencil in a great thick note-book bound in yellow (for I contrived to get a sight of the manuscript) – here was a line that could be seen and followed; and though I can't say that my pencil dashed, it laboured bravely; and what with the help of the deckle-edged lyrics, and of certain volumes from other hands – *Ballads and Sonnets*, for example, and *Shorter Poems*, to which I lightly added the poetry of Keats – my own yellow note-book produced its yield, a remarkable amalgam, surely, blending and uniting the genius of such masters. As for my poems, it seemed as though they might be very good without my knowing it; I couldn't be sure that they were not. But it wasn't

my poems so much as it was the sight of my note-book with its copious scribblings that I admired; the consciousness of authorship was mine, it looked so like the manuscript of a poet. And indeed the sense of the proximity of an author's workshop, close at hand, under this very roof – where he sat with book and pencil, surrounded by the litter of his craft – giving you a glimpse behind the scenes of an author's life, a hint of its working reality: this was a sting to the imagination throughout those years, never blunted. My tutor had a style of allusion to his writing, when I began to dare to make him talk of it – a style at once negligent and fond, as though he loved his craft too happily to be solemn in it, loved it with a joy that the least could share with the greatest – a style that I took from the first to be strikingly fine and just; and I don't know that I was wrong.

But to most of us, it must be owned, the fact that he was a writer was of no moment; it was forgotten, it was remembered as a foible for writing 'minor poetry,' a habit you may smile at and pass. He had another talent, however, of greater note; he was a story-teller, the best without exception that I ever heard. This was the scene, on any Sunday evening after tea: his younger pupils flocked to his study and disposed themselves to wait, and presently he came hurrying in and threw himself into his armchair by the fire. 'Well then, tell me exactly where I left off last week,' he said; and we were ready with the word, left hanging last Sunday on the edge of such a crisis; and he took it up without a

moment of uncertainty, and began. In a low voice, with never a hitch or pause, he proceeded for the hour; the story slid smoothly away, unwinding its intrigue, always on the same quiet note; and as the strange mystery darkened and cleared it was charged with impressiveness, heightened in its gravity by the veiling of the voice by the fireside, in the low-lit room. It was entrancing; a hush of absorption filled the room, as the story bore us from suspense to discovery, through scenes that were subdued and uneventful to the eye, and yet you felt the tensity of drama beneath the surface – not always uneventful, however, for the hidden forces will break out at times, and wild things are enacted, all the graver in their implication because the voice never rises, never pauses on their grimness, their horror. 'And there I must stop for to-day,' says the story-teller – the hour has flown. Next week we shall hear more, and on the last Sunday of the half we shall hear the end that crowns it all. 'Strange,' said Arthur Benson, talking of it afterwards – 'I could read them such far better stories out of books, if they preferred it.' Not they – the magic of the story told in the firelight is beyond all books. And those stories of his were surely wonders of fertile and masterly invention. Were they not? Unluckily custom decreed that the audience should be very juvenile, 'lower boys' only; so that memory speaks in this case from a great distance. But what of that, if I remember the wonder like yesterday? I am satisfied by the proof that those stories were the best in the world.

XVII

OUR house, imbued with the spirit of its presiding genius, had a sociable character; we didn't live immured or obscure, we were open to the coming and going of visitors of many kinds. Our host, for all the jealous hoarding of his spare hours, with all his inclination to bolt to his manuscript in a sacred corner, had nothing like the heart of a recluse; he enjoyed the stir of the world, while he cried out over his harried and violated privacy. In one way and another we saw many an affable guest, many a stranger of distinction; for they came, doffing their pride, to solicit or placate the master of a house on which, I may say, interested eyes were cast by a goodly section of English life. An Eton master, possessor of a house in which a deal of England would be glad to see its sons installed, has a royal position, to be sure – such great ones you may see attending him with their suit, waiting on his convenience, following him through the warren-like passages of his old domain with respectful solicitude; the master of the house has that in his gift, to grant or to withhold, which endows him with high consequence. So at least it strikes the onlooker; and Arthur Benson in his day had his ample portion of this power. He

liked it, as he might well, and he wore it without the slightest constraint. And then he had also his place in the life of letters – a place which wasn't then (as it was to be later on) at the head of a flock of readers whom you might think simple and uncritical. His repute in those days was discreet and choice, if it wasn't wide; he had his association with the band of the poets of the hour, that chorus of town-nightingales which is now historic; he was to be found in the *Yellow Book* decidedly the least splenetic of its brood, no doubt, but there he was. See then what doors were open in our house, on different sides; and visitors from time to time came in by each. Indeed he liked the world, whatever he said, but never to the point of giving himself away to it; he could never have cast in his lot with the life of the open and inhabited there. Yet if the world came to seek him out on his own ground it found him – with luck, if he hadn't fled to his corner – entirely at home with it, always hospitably talkative. Only it must take its chance, it must fit into his hunted days where it could; it was to count on no encouragement from himself to encroach upon his leisure.

But first I think of other Eton masters, those of his colleagues who were familiar under our roof – among whom Ainger and Cornish, Luxmoore and Austen Leigh, were the older guard. Arthur Benson, not submissive to their age, drew easily to the company of his seniors. He entertained them with no deference; they discoursed and argued and enjoyed themselves together

at a round table where none fared more ceremonially than another. There too is heard the voice of Walter Durnford, planting its stroke in the dispute; you see him sitting in the circle, erect and compact, with asperity in the beak of his nose, in the uncompromising knock-you-down of his statement – with rich geniality in his rosy and festal good humour. There too, if I look for younger faces, I find many of which I don't speak – for the fortunate reason that they are still to be seen at Eton, or wherever else their spreading fortunes have borne them. But among the younger there was one, most familiar of all, long since removed by his untimely death – Herbert Tatham, closest and most constant of all Arthur Benson's companions: sturdy, broad-faced, a figure weightily knit together in mass and strength, a nature full of wisdom and potency and slow deep laughter. Tatham was too careless of his effect, too indifferent to the show of his power, to be fully known to us in the range and reach of his indolent genius; yet we knew him well, with his comfortable chuckle, with the low gurgle of his utterance that lets fall so pregnant a judgment. They were well contrasted, he and his closest friend: one so ready with his best, so swift to extemporise an opinion, a dogma, a decision; the other so broadly beamed, moving deliberately with the current of his humorous rumination. There was a deeper force in Tatham than was manifest in any obvious mark that he left on Eton; but it was clear to those of his intimacy, what he was. Arthur Benson was never given to hero-

worship, nor did his candour spare his friends; but of Tatham his remark was always the same – a man who had everything but the spark of ambition that would have revealed what he had. I remember evening visits that he sometimes paid us, and how little he had to say, yet how his quiet capacious memory seemed to be stored with everything, great and small, that one most wished to hear about; not a question one could start that didn't stir some interesting answer from his knowledge or experience, straight to the point.

If our tutor was entertaining his friends on Saturday night he would perhaps engage one of them to attend the session of our debating-society. The president was in his chair, the rest of us in support, when the visitor was introduced and received with all due form; and the visitor for the occasion shall be our excellent musician, our precentor, the pleasant master of our school-music, Charles Harford Lloyd. Bright-eyed and restless, he responded with effusion; his scanty-trimmed beard quivered with the impetus of his quick and courteous words. Lloyd was all movement, and it seemed at any moment that he must take thought to suppress it – as though, if he forgot to remember to be still, he would spring to his light feet in airy agitation. He did his best to sit in his place and follow the argument from speaker to speaker; but his eyes darted and beamed, always in pleased benevolence, though the question in hand – shall we give votes to women? shall we abolish the monarchy? – detained his attention only in streaks and

spots, as his glance was caught in its flittings. The question was settled and re-settled by each of us in turn, with no waste of words, till it came round to Arthur Benson; and if by that time it seemed, in spite of so much finality, to have knotted itself into strange confusion – so that you hardly knew where it still was, where it ended or began – by him it was skilfully disentangled with unhesitating touches; he always knew what he thought, what he would propose to be done in the matter, without a fumble. And so he sits down, and the president calls on the distinguished visitor whom we are glad to see amongst us to-night. Lloyd, startled to discover that the word is addressed to him, visibly recaptures his hovering thought; and he is on his feet in a moment – no difficulty in that – and he is delighted to acknowledge the compliment of the invitation; but as for the question, this is a serious matter on which he may hardly presume to trench, where such eloquence has preceded him; yet stay, he has his small contribution to offer, and with a flutter of agreeable perturbation a neat though breathless point is made in the debate. Of Lloyd as a great musician we knew what we could, according to our lights; on that matter if I presumed to trench I could go far, but it would be outside my present path. Lloyd as a bright-glancing light-stepping figure in our midst is clear to the memory of us all. The music of his presence at Eton was a cheerful tune, eagerly and alertly trilled.

Majora canamus: the notes of Eton were full and

varied, but they weren't likely to hold my wonder with the spell of certain calls that I heard from without, suddenly drawing into earshot. One evening I sat at tea with a companion in my tiny room when the door was opened by my tutor – an unusual visit at that hour, and the reason of it was rarer still. Somebody followed him, a stranger – who advanced with a smile, almost with a bow, with little ceremonies of suavity and cordiality, and held my hand with a pressure that was a compliment in itself. His spectacles gleamed in his courtly salutation. Here was a brilliant affair in my scrap of a room, with the teapot and the loaf upon the table; it was a reception in state – my two candles glittered like a hundred wax-lights in a saloon. Shy I might be, but not so awkward that I couldn't meet my visitor with a becoming response to the honour of his call. And meanwhile my tutor was introducing Mr. Edmund Gosse. He was no stranger to me by name; I knew him well as the first and greatest of my tutor's literary friends, and I knew that through him one reached away to worlds of more distant marvel – reached in particular to a dazzling tale that I had by heart, that which had ended of late on a mountain-top in southern seas. I was shaking hands with Stevenson's friend. He talked gaily, phrasing his amiability with the easy art of a master of style; nobody could so talk who wasn't the wielder of a classic pen. And yet he talked with trips and becks of informality, breaking away with exclamations at my bookshelf, with approving

surprise at my choice of reading – but ah, with a poet at our head, what wonder if this is a house of culture. He shook his finger at my copy of the *Yellow Book*, but that too may pass if it is a number to which Mr. Benson has contributed. He gave the little visit a sort of elegant archness, a silvery tinkle of coquetry that was charming and flattering; and he left me all in a whirl with the sense of having touched the magic circle of the great – more than touched, for he had drawn me into it with the charm of his delicate attentions; positively he had seemed to coax and encourage our friendly understanding. I had received an invitation to return his call when I came to London; and in due course I did so – the first of how many scores of times that he gave me his always caressing, always enlivening welcome. That story belongs not here; but the beginning of it belongs, when he was brought by Arthur Benson to visit a young enthusiast in his house.

Another evening I remember that was to bear yet richer fruit, though it didn't look as promising at the time. There was no festal light on this occasion. It was a summer evening, not one of our best; the falling day was chilly and dull in the small chamber that was so cheerful at tea-time in November. Now it had no comfort; tea was finished in a squalid litter, the basket-chair before the empty grate was uninviting; the twilight fell mean and forlorn upon to-morrow's task not yet begun. Summer that is no summer is a wretchedness at Eton, and there is plenty of it; the young green-

ery looks miserable under the blight of the heavy sky; the boxes of flowers in all the windows are a mockery, a pretence of gaiety that shivers in the thin bleak breeze. Eton life is designed to fit the calendar, not the weather, and once designed it is not to be changed; you must go through with the assumption that the sun is always golden in the playing-fields, always warm and benignant on your task by the fireless grate. This was an evening of the blankest desolation when my tutor appeared once more in my room with a visitor. Who was it? He hadn't the sparkling forwardness of the other, and somehow between his hesitation and his massiveness the introduction was bungled; I didn't catch his name. He was sturdy and large-headed, with a close dark beard. He did his best, I am sure, to see an interest in the wretched little room and its inconspicuous owner; but it was a laborious proceeding, and I felt myself that there was none in either. We toiled at a few trivialities, where we could find them, but the chill and the gloom and the squalor were too much for us all; even my resourceful tutor was at a loss. I still had no idea who the stranger might be when he was released; with all courtesy but no particularity he said good-bye and was borne away. A chapter that was to develop so memorably never opened so tamely; for this was my first sight of Henry James.

Even on the Fourth of June the sun didn't always shine, and the draggled finery of a wet Fourth of June is lamentable beyond words. But let us suppose the

best – it is a pretty sight. The master of the house is regal in entertainment on this day. In the long low dining-room, with the grasses of the church-yard waving in at the windows, in his own private parlour with its round table, in his study bright with books – from midday, when festivity begins, till long after nightfall, when the last rocket has exploded on Fellow's Eyot – the throng of brilliance, assembling, scattering, re-uniting, claims possession of him; and he faces the invasion, I don't say with pleasure, but with some enjoyment of his high-handed command of the predicament, satisfaction in the ease with which he meets and surmounts and at last allays the annual tempest. It looms hideous beforehand, but in the event he finds it inspiriting; he isn't displeased, for once in a way, to see the schoolmaster's workaday retreat so flaringly illuminated. A tempest is it? But it may also strike you as a riot of colour, where the familiar ground of school-life is suddenly bright with such a bunch of the flowers of the world. The master of the house moves to and fro among them with less harassment than he pretends, indeed with none at all, and with a thought in his mind that secretly tickles his humour. There is much in a schoolmaster's life that may seem grey and even dingy beside this colour – but who would suppose it here and now? Here in the house of the schoolmaster are all the lighter graces of civilisation, ready to meet the world in a moment; and it amuses my tutor to play the host to the world, just for once, and to prove to you how wrong

you are if you think that grace and lightness aren't scholastic adornments. Perhaps you have no such idea; and yet we all know the traditional figure of the school-usher, the pedant among the inkpots and bare benches of his calling; and now you may recall that figure in this scene of the Fourth of June, and smile at the absurdity of the contrast. It is a trifle, but the touch of amusement and defiance refreshes my tutor in these long hours of stir and chatter; and by the end of the day he deserves whatever refreshment he can take. Night falls at last, and there is a lull when the company streams out to Fellow's Eyot for the fireworks. He needn't follow it there; he sinks exhausted on a seat in his shadowy garden, under the stars.

I remember how I sat beside him, watching the rockets flare up behind the dark distant trees. It was my last Fourth of June in the school; and if I looked back to my first I could feel that I was divided from it by a good part of a lifetime. So long and large are the years at Eton that a half-dozen of them, when you see them behind you, stretch away to the horizon and dip over the edge; my sojourn in the school shows the curve of a protracted and completed career. Immensely far away, dipping out of sight, lie the agitations of my youth in the school; and now, a person of responsibility, I sit beside a man with whom I talk in mutual confidence – the man who has brought me by his help and influence, constant and clever and inspiring, from the beginning to the end of this strange revolution in my state. What

don't I owe him? – and what wonder if he is paramount and absolute in the circle of all my thought? We talk in the starlight of many things – not solemnly, much less sentimentally, though these last flying Eton days vanish with a wrench to my feelings that I could never have foreseen. He isn't one that will encourage you in emotional regrets and reflections. He doesn't look back; he can't linger over the past that is finished, where there is no more room for his impatient activity. He likes the speed and rattle of life in movement, life in which a man's impatience can be absorbed and turned to account. He never stops to think: why should he? – for as fast as he goes his thought is swifter still, always ahead of his need from moment to moment; and thus he is never confused in his intention, he always knows what he means to do or say on the spot. He will sit quiet in the starlight for half an hour, at the end of a more than usually exhausting day; and he will eloquently proclaim his loathing for the rush and the turmoil – so persuasively indeed that his young disciple is quite deluded, and obediently proceeds on his own account to loathe them too. A sharper eye than a young disciple's would pierce the screen of phrases and recognise this man: one who loves life imperiously, who requires it absolutely – yet not too much of it, just so much as he can hold beneath his hand.

On this Fourth of June he might well be conscious that he held not a little. To the house that he ruled he had given of his very best, and we may claim that his

gift had returned to him in good measure; the success of his rule wasn't doubted by those who looked on, nor the liberality of its temper. He was known, he was marked; on the ground of his small kingdom attention reached him from many quarters with expectant looks; it sounded in the air that a bigger kingdom, perhaps Eton itself, might be his in due time. To himself his ambition wore a doubtful face; for as clearly as he knew his mind on the instant, he looked forward with no assurance, no principle to decide a choice not yet in sight. It was an uncertainty that troubled him a little, but not much; on the whole the present day was enough, with fifty things in it to love and enjoy – or what did almost as well, to detest and denounce. The day was winged with interest; and even the refusal of his ambition to speak plainly, this too had its cheer; for it kept up the dance of possibilities – there they were before him, all in his power, ministering to the exhilaration of the day. I have complained before now of the want of a high wind to blow open the guards and pretences of our schooltime; but am I not telling of a man in whose company the air could never be still for an instant? So it would seem, so it was; but with all the lively breeze in which he lived, there was nobody more guarded than Arthur Benson. He was alert to question and explore; but like the famous picnic-party on Box Hill, he preferred to explore where he was, without leaving the spot. He wouldn't if he knew it be taken at a disadvantage, he wouldn't risk a defeat. But here on his own plot at

Eton there was no question of defeat; and the future was still far enough ahead, with its beckoning hands, to enhance and not to embarrass the activity of his fancy. For a self-mistrustful youth, trying to believe in his own skill, it was dazzling to look on at such facility, such mastery. Did he take us too fast over difficulties? Well, we are soon leaving Eton, there will soon be plenty of solid obstacles to retard us; and meanwhile the friendship of Arthur Benson is the sovereign factor, the most vivid and enkindling, in the whole long age of our education.

XVIII

AND yet of all that I had learned at Eton there was one thing, perhaps the best, that I certainly hadn't learned from my tutor – the love of Eton. It is strange to remember, throughout those years of his brilliant and prosperous work in the school, no word that he said of any kindness for the old mother whom he served, any tenderness for her age and dignity, any pride in her past. The background of Eton had no possession in him at all. How could this be? – for in fact there was no one to match him in his quickness to seize the hints of romance and beauty, every day, every hour. He lost none of them, but he snatched them in passing and they couldn't detain him. The school had nurtured him from his boyhood, and it must be said that Eton had been good to him, giving him scope for the best of his work, not grudging him the praise of it; and Eton must surely have wondered why she missed, from this signally favoured son, the tribute of piety that so few of her brood have withheld. Where was the fault? It can't be laid upon Eton; for her children in their candour will accuse her of a hundred failings, but never of this, that she fails to hold their hearts. Arthur Benson, to the end of his long intimacy with the place, seemed at heart as

cool and detached in sentiment as a stranger. He never lingered over the past, I said – he shook it off and went forward. He lived intensely within himself, but only there; so that nothing of himself was left behind in the past on which he turned his back. And the strange thing was that while he utterly evaded its influence he forgot none of it; for in his memory the old days re-appeared, when he chose to call them, as new and sharp in impression as ever they were, and he bore them in mind like a drama that at any moment could be played for his amusement; up went the curtain at a word, and he had only to watch. It was his own to command; and his strongly marked identity was ringed about by a line that mightn't be crossed from within or without, the inviolable circle of himself. He admitted no claim of any one or anything to cross it.

The claim of Eton was no exception to his rule, and he didn't infringe it for Eton's sake. The tradition of the place, that breaks down all our defences at last, beat vainly against his – not without a certain effect, however, and that one unfortunate. Eton, the great old mother, won't be so tactful, or so proudly indifferent, as to draw back and let you alone if you resist her. Here is one son among so many thousands, one who remains intractable; there must be some mistake, it would seem – and Eton works unceasingly to put it right. In other words the multitudinous pressure of all the worth and beauty, all the authority, all the historic honour of the place, besets the recalcitrant child, year

in, year out, massed in such force that he can't pretend to ignore it; and as much as he wards it off, he feels the perpetual demand that is laid on him to surrender, to be good and kind to Eton like the rest. The trouble is that in dealing with anything so old and great as Eton, so much more ancient, more widely reaching than yourself, you can't make terms of your own with any hope of imposing them. Eton, accepted or resisted, will always overshadow you; and at the best you are one among thousands, enrolled in an army – and whose identity was ever safe and secure in an army? If you won't go with the crowd you must hold out as you may within the circle of yourself. Do so, then, if you can; but perhaps it will seem a barren victory. There you are, working your best on your guarded ground; and it grows to seem like a grievance that whereas you serve so well and truly, giving so much, more is expected of you, to give yourself. And this is the unfortunate result, that the man whose independence can't be given away, can't be suffered to take its chance in the equal crowd, will never be at ease in the place that is greater than himself.

It is a rare experience for Eton to be held so resolutely at arm's length – especially by one as social, as conversable and inquisitive as Arthur Benson. It was not as though he brooded over principles that would admit no compromise; he was all for a light and experimental handling of things as they came, of life as it faced you. Eton was too massive for such play. But as for the castigation that the place received from this man in the

course of years, we needn't pity Eton over much. It may well be that none of it missed some vulnerable point, though some of it was perhaps too offhand, too easily improvised to pierce deep. The detail of his criticism of the teaching of Eton is no concern of mine; but the sight of this light-armed peltast, untiringly springing his attack on his slow-moving antagonist, may be watched by any onlooker, not without pleasure in its animation. Eton from of old was stately in posture and deliberate in action. New-fangled theories, upstart ideas, didn't suit her genius. Let these be proved and matured elsewhere; when they have acquired some warmth and mellowness of tone Eton, that can afford to wait, will adopt them. If anybody has regarded this caution with a fleer, pointing to the place that magnificently commanded the advance of education from the tail, the sarcasm hasn't rankled, for Eton could afford to smile. If times change, and if it begins to appear that the honest young brood of the school, out in the world, are at a disadvantage because they aren't as sprucely equipped as they might be – then it will doubtless be seen that our good mother bestirs herself, catches up the ideas that are now matured, and brings them as handily into action as any theorising modernist could desire. Meanwhile the upbraiding of one of the most candid of her sons is bearable, perhaps not unwholesome; one shouldn't become so unused to argument that its edge cuts distressingly into one's repose. I don't mean that Arthur Benson was alone in dis-

turbing the bosom of Eton with his outcry ever her antiquated ways; but he was always more provocative than most, and wherever he argued there was a whizzing of words that left nobody unstirred. Did he dispute and debate without painful reflection? It is very possible; but at the bottom of it all lay a fact, what he declared to be a fact, that it was surely now the time to explore. 'After all,' he said flatly, 'we don't educate these boys.'

At a sufficient distance, heard across a stretch of years and leagues, the assertion may strike you as ingenuous. Who ever denied it? Who had expected or required that these boys should be educated? – they weren't at Eton for the sake of the things that anybody could teach them. Of course they have to sit and be taught for certain hours of the day, or the place would be no school; but the real need is simply that these boys should be at Eton – there they are, and all is well. Leave the buzz of the dispute, where it flies round the circle of those whose interest in it is professional – leave it and go to the world, to the bit of England that fosters and cherishes Eton: the storm-raising question seems to be taken calmly here. Aren't the boys educated? If the question were pressed, in spite of its irrelevance – if we look back across the stretch of time to the days of our youth and collect our memories for an answer – sure enough we know that we left the school in a remarkable haze of mind concerning most of the things we had been taught; and of this I can feel convinced, for I count so readily, as I said before, the passages that

do show clearly in the haze, the occasions of my teaching that struck a light and kept it burning. One here, another there and there, I still see them plainly; I could name and describe them all. But didn't we nevertheless depart, if not with a great many lights, at least with a suffused illumination – at least with a knowledge of our ignorance and a desirous enthusiasm to get the better of it? You couldn't call us uneducated if that were so. Or did we rather emerge from our schooling, the main army of us, with no impassioned curiosity to discover where we stood among the ideas of the world – and did we proceed on our way well satisfied with our own stock of thought, what it was – and have we carried our notions on to middle age, much as they were, a summary handful authenticated by the stamp of Eton? Well, we belonged to Eton during the time, the phase of Eton's history, when the prime charge laid upon the school was to train good citizens for the commonwealth; nothing, or so little by comparison, had been said of any need to expose us to the ideas of the world.

If the times are changed once again, and the good citizen now needs more than the mere warrant of his stamp; if it behoves him to be armed with notions that will hold their own among those of the world at large; if the pace of the day requires him to be more than the honest and responsible schoolboy that Warre's Eton did her best to make him: then the resonance of all that talk about education at Eton was symptomatic, was a sign of change in the air, though it mightn't appear to be

greatly agitating the pleasant land in the homes of holiday. Didn't I say that a new mood at Eton was ever the reflection of a fresh idea in the pleasant land? – and this time Eton perhaps was catching it with promptitude, for all her inclination to more leisurely ways. It may be that at this point Eton makes a notable decision – to divide her attention more equally between the brain and the character of her children, not relaxing the care for their honesty, but enhancing the regard for their wits. My story ends at any rate in the sound of an animated argument, none of which is matter that it concerns me to touch. Whatever it may be that you set about doing when you decide that your boys shall be as enlightened in mind as they are pleasant in temper, no one at a far distance, no one talking at ease of the old times, out of sight of the new, has a call to intervene with anything but the best of good wishes. Only one question, shooting off from the argument at a tangent, strikes the onlooker at a distance – a question so general that I needn't be afraid to pick it up, but also a question so loaded with implications that I drop it with one glance. Join me in one glance; and then my story ends.

This is the question. Is it really possible for brain to be stimulated and character fortified in one place, at one time, by the care of one and the same society of men? Here are two functions to be combined; and if you look at them separately, measuring the demand of each, you may conclude that it is in their very nature to fly asunder. Can you believe that the genius of any

place and any society will be inspired to equal intensity by two passions, two that can take no account of each other, two that set towards opposite poles? I picture the poor genius trying to reconcile the conflicting desires within her bosom, torn to distraction – at last inevitably driven to allay the tumult by indulging one of the two at the expense of the other. For they do indeed conflict, it must be allowed, and neither is worth anything if it hasn't the avidity and jealousy of a passion. Both, then, are absolute in their exactions; and you see how each of them refuses to be constrained by the claims that are proper to the other – how this one rushes off upon airy ways, looking for adventure, and that one builds upon the ground, establishing a fortress. No matter, for the awakening of young thought, if the master of the young forgets to be careful of their daily and worldly needs; no matter at all, so long as he rejoices in the life of the mind and believes with fervour in its value. He is to fire the pursuit of knowledge with excitement; he can't stay to consider precautions and compunctions that belong to another field, while his own is all-absorbing. He is not to be expected at every turn to arrest himself, to shift the object of his passion – in fact to be changed into another man. As for the other man, he watches the young creature's growth among his kind, on the ground of action, in a populated world. This man's care is practical; and in a region where perils are so many and so various his care is bound to be circumspect – for the penalty of rashness is here exacted, perhaps disastrously,

as by good fortune it isn't in the adventure of young thought. And so a very different temper reigns in this matter of training a character of tender age, to the end that it may stand honourably in command of itself in the world of its kind. Is it then asked that the masters of youth shall be a company all endowed with gifts so diversely brilliant? – a galaxy indeed, if they are all to be illuminated twice over, in two kinds, where once and one only makes a brilliant gift. Enough, the question has been given a glance. It dropped so noticeably at our feet that it was tempting to raise it for a moment; but let it go.

As for my story, I have tried to show something of that which Eton did for the stirring of an imagination; but it is clear how great are the tracts of the story that have been passed over with scarcely a word. Of all that it may have meant for a young scrap of life to belong to Eton it is only the value of certain hours, scattered over years, that may be told – hours that can be taken from the rest, to be handled and shaped in memory. Few they are indeed, whatever their value, beside the rest; and the expanse of the years, as I consider it, seems hardly diminished at all by the handful of time plucked out and bestowed in these pages. In that which remains behind there was room for how much – for more than could be packed into thrice that number of years away from Eton. I surely don't exaggerate; for there can't be many of us, in our simpler and safer middle age, who are called upon to live at the tension of our

schooldays. Plumped down into a crowd, with no choice given you of time or ground from which to face it – there you were, momently improvising your means of dealing with the crowd before and behind you, always in sight of them all if they chose to notice you; and think of the care that was needed to contrive that they shouldn't notice you too often and too much. That to begin with: and then, when by bravery or ingenuity you have secured yourself in some small corner, if only one of harmless obscurity, behold you now engaged in a drama unceasingly eventful – wherein your nearer companions of the crowd, those more closely involved in your day's affairs, play their parts so urgently, often so unexpectedly; and as for your own part you must invent it as you proceed, never knowing what the next turn of events will demand. However by this time you have a private understanding with an ally or two beside you, more than two if you are lucky; and these make an island of stability in the general commotion. Here you may pause and relax and have your talk out; and yet beware! – for even here there are strange possibilities of surprise, earthquakes that send the island pitching sideways; but at last you may feel that friendship is security, and with your few you have an alliance against chances of the day, and a store of interest and humour and comfortable habit on which you may constantly draw. And still it is true that nothing really settles down into custom and safety; for all this time something else is happening, uncontrollably, unpredictably: you

are growing, changing with growth – and this enormously complicates everything else, as if it weren't bewildering enough already. And not only you, all the others are growing around you; and nobody could rightly describe the confusion, the criss-cross of sensation, the deep shyness, the defiant effrontery, the generosity and the meanness, the brilliance and the ignominy – all the extraordinary mixture that is crammed into a life which indeed is growing as fast as it can, but which appears to be expected, long before it is full grown, to contain the world. Compared with all this riot and mutiny of experience, how safe is the round, how simple the custom of middle age! – and it is no wonder if few of the days and hours of growth, no more than a few here and there, can be taken and bound in words.

But the tumult, joyful or dreadful, belongs not in particular to Eton; it belongs to all the world. To Eton and to Eton alone we ascribe the pleasant images I place before me, the roofs and towers and trees that are still there, the friendly figures that are gone. And again, whether we could truthfully say that our school-time was a happy one – the answer to this question, yes or no, tells you much of the nature of our youth and growth, but little of Eton. It is by the temper of our love for Eton that the true story is told. At the best, with all that the genius of the school can ever accomplish, it can't relieve us of the chief of our difficulties, which is to be young and to grow; and the highest accomplishment of Eton will always be this, as it has been in the

past – to be loved by the young. It is Eton's great gift to youth; and because we feel that the gift can never be slighted, therefore – the reason may seem to be sufficient in itself – we believe in the future of Eton. We talk of all the other works that are wrought, or yet remain to be wrought, by Eton upon her youth; but whatever we find to say of them, in gratitude or in hope, they would appear to us by comparison of small account if this were all – if Eton only lived to do us good. The real heart of our thought, under all our talk, is that Eton lives and will live to be loved.

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